

SAILING ON TO  
ICELAND

and

ACROSS CANADA

R. D. CUMMING

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**The "Esja," Icelandic Government steamship, which  
"braved the  
battle and the breeze" of the Arctic Ocean on the  
excursion covered  
by the story in this book, *Sailing on to Iceland*, snapped by  
the author  
at Reykjavik, Iceland.**

**SAILING ON TO  
ICELAND**

**AND**

**ACROSS CANADA BY RAIL**

by

**R. D. (Robert Dalziel) CUMMING**

Author of  
SKOOKUM CHUCK FABLES  
PAUL PERO, ETC.

1938  
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## DEDICATION

Dedicated to the passengers and crew of the Icelandic Government Steamship Esja, on her trip from Glasgow to Iceland and return, August fourteenth to twenty-sixth, 1936, both dates inclusive.

My aim is to write the truth that is just as strange as fiction; and, being the truth, far more interesting than fiction.—  
R.D.C.

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Out in the Wilds

Back to Reykjavik

Iceland not so Different

Weighing Anchor

Community Spirit on the Esja

A Country Without a Railway.

Chinook

Poetry and Botany.

SECOND EDITION, REVISED

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# SAILING ON TO ICELAND

## CHAPTER I.

### WE EMBARK AT GLASGOW.

Being among the first to arrive, we stood on the deck of the *Esja*, an Icelandic excursion steamer, and watched the passengers come on board in the same manner as the animals had entered Noah's Ark a number of years ago.

On the shore end of the gangway stood Inspector Noah checking up on British credentials for the Iceland Immigration Department before patrons were permitted to enter the ark. They came in groups of ones and sometimes "two by two," until the whole forty or more had been admitted and shown to their staterooms.

They were a job lot sort of passengers drawn from the great general mass of the people; but although they came in little friendly groups, in the aggregate they were total strangers to each other. But soon the social atmosphere was to become warmer, and friendships were to spring up among them that were to endure, perhaps, just as long as life itself. We were to become close friends, faithful companions, chums, playmates, all rolled up into one. The emergency was to do it—the emergency of being thrown together for twelve, long happy days.

It was the 14th day of August, 1936, the place was Govan Dock, Glasgow, and the schedule of the Esja was a sort of experiment with Iceland to test out the possibility of tourist trade development. The Esja was one unit of a fleet of steamers maintained by the government of Iceland, whose itineraries were around the island summer and winter.

As usual, there was the criticism of impatient passengers that, no matter how much grace time was given, someone would be late; and, sure enough, one passenger walked the plank five minutes after six p.m., the hour scheduled for our departure, and even Clyde tides will await no tourist boat heading for Iceland. However, in the nick of time we were all tucked away, and the Ark was sailing down the Clyde.

We were a bit cosmopolitan in nationality, Scotland and England having the majority and minority respectively, and the other one being a Canadian from Canada. However, our traditions were identical, and that paved the way for the frictionless friendship that sprang up among us. We had one common shortcoming, however—none of us could speak Icelandic.

There was disappointment at the tonnage of the boat. Most of us were accustomed to 20,000 ton or more Atlantic liners, and thought 1,400 tons a bit wee to fight a big Arctic Ocean. However, the Esja had done it before, and would probably do it again; and, if the worst came to the worst, we could always blame it on the captain.

In due course we passed the berth where the Queen Mary had her birth, later the place where the unfortunate French Atlantique was being scrapped for her iron and fittings, and

during the night rounded the Mull of Kintyre in perfect safety and were at the mercy of the great Atlantic Ocean. Our fears lacked foundation for the Esja rode the waves like a real viking ship of old with proud traditional defiance.

### **Not Like Vikings.**

But the passengers didn't ride the ship with the same impunity as the ancient Iceland seamen who discovered America long prior to 1492, because that fiend of the ocean, sea-sickness, seized ninety-nine per cent of us and cast its gloom abroad, and the poet of the ship was inspired to write:

On Esja's deck the tourists go  
From rail to railing dour and slow,  
And in the air the gull, still free,  
Looks on the sorry sight below.

At any rate, the following day appetites were restored, dining tables began to fill up again and the process of getting acquainted was resumed. Faces began to come up out of the depths of the general into the realms of the individual; the stranger disappeared and the friend took his place; unconsciously we assumed the relationship of the big family rather than that of casual acquaintances; and found we could like each other better at second than at first sight. We were better than the average family, because we never quarrelled, perhaps because we didn't know each other well enough for

that. Anyway, after a while we were better brothers and sisters than in most family gatherings of strangers, found the number conducive to that sort of thing, and began at once to take advantage of the opportunity.

## **The Esja.**

The Esja is a unit of the Icelandic government merchant and passenger marine, and her beat circumnavigates Iceland year in and year out, summer and winter—summer's long day, winter's long night. It can scarcely be imagined what that entails, but in the words of one of the crew who spoke tolerable English, it means: "Cold, snow, ice, rain, wind, waves and dark." Of course that was the winter fare, because in the summer time the sun rarely sets, and there is little need for daylight saving.

Ours was the last of four trips during July and August, and the Esja and crew have resumed the winter schedule going 'round and 'round Iceland in the "dark, ice, snow, storms, etc."

## **CHAPTER II.**

### **A WEE BOAT AND A BIG SEA.**

None of the Esja's crew could speak English. Nor did they understand Scottish, and there are many similar words in the Scottish and Icelandic languages. It surprised some of the crew to learn that there was a difference between English and Scottish, that the Englishman could not speak the language to the north, but that the Scot could speak the language to the south even better than some Englishmen.

It is only natural that the Icelander should prefer English owing to its wide distribution, but the Scottish tongue would be far easier because of the similarity of words and words in common. However, under the difficulties of communication, we didn't argue the point. In Icelandic schools, courses in English, French and German are compulsory.

We soon discovered that the language problem was going to be quite a handicap on the Esja. This was chiefly felt at the dining table with the waiter and in our staterooms with the stewards and stewardesses. The handicap became so acute in time that the Don Juan of the party said it would be worth while learning Icelandic in order to converse with his wee stewardess. However, he had the smile which is the same in all languages, and he employed that medium, with more or less success. Little Icelandic dictionaries were sold on the boat at one krona (10 pence) each, and we were soon able to say "heicht vatn" (hot water); and "calt vatn" (cold water) with only a slight foreign accent, and fully expected to return to Scotland good Icelandic scholars at any rate. The captain spoke very good English and many of our lingual problems were put up to him. With some patience a few of his subordinates could grasp our needs, immediate and future, if

they happened to be in the Icelandic mood; and, without exception, they were a fine obedient lot of humble servants.

## The Glacial Period.

The east coast of Iceland is much nearer the north pole and glacial age conditions than the west coast, and is the parking place of the largest glacier in Europe. Our schedule called for a visit on pony back to Hornafjordur, the home of Vatnajokull, a great Arctic icefield, but the passage into the harbour of the settlement was so narrow (40 feet) it wouldn't admit a 35-foot boat in rough weather, even with a competent pilot at the wheel, so the ponies and the glacier are awaiting our next visit to Iceland. This is on the east coast. We had a splendid view of the glacier from the Esja out at sea, and are taking Iceland's guarantee that it is the largest in Europe. The great body of ice and snow fills valleys and covers mountains as far as the eye can see, and the ship's poet again came to the rescue:

Mountains half buried in ice and snow,  
Valleys filled up to the brim, that lie  
Ages old; and the mists hang low,  
And winds cut down from the northern sky.

But that is only the first glimpse of Iceland which isn't very encouraging to the tourist or compensation for the expense. However, it was Iceland at its worst, because the island isn't all buried in ice and snow as the first impression may convey.

The west coast gives a far better welcome with bright sunshine, mellow atmosphere and soft winds arising from the Gulf Stream that fans the coast of Iceland. It is more encouraging to the botanist, the geologist and the tourist in general with its green carpet covering its hills and plains, and its rugged extinct volcanoes.

There is no ice and snow to be seen from Reykjavik, the capital of Iceland, and during our few days' stay the weather was better than it was in Scotland when we left Glasgow.

### **"The Battle and the Breeze."**

The night's sail from Hornafjordur to Reykjavik, however, was a stormy one for a small boat on a big sea, but it was mere initiation into what was to follow on the way home. Convalescents had relapses and declared the boat stood on end several times during the night, and was half the time on one side or the other. There were grunts and groans and its stout timbers shivered many times before morning.

It was somewhat of a relief when we sighted Reykjavik about noon and found ourselves becalmed in its peaceful harbour. We weren't very far from the Arctic Circle, but the novelty of being nearer the north pole than we had ever been before or ever expected to be again banished all the horrors of seasickness and thoughts of the "wild ride" we had while rounding the southern coast of Iceland from Hornafjordur.

## CHAPTER III.

### HOW WE MADE THE GEYSER "GEYSE."

We were in Iceland, that land of mystery which everyone has heard about, which everyone would like to see, but which few have had the opportunity to visit; that land which claims relationship to Europe, but which in reality is more a part of the American continent, being nearer the western than the eastern hemisphere.

The day after our arrival in Iceland we sat around the crater of the Great Geyser away in the interior from Reykjavik and waited for it to "geyse." Chills ran up and down our backs from the icy wind that cut down from the north, while our fronts and faces sweated condensed steam from the boiling water in the "bowl." If you can picture a plate of hot, steaming consomme, you have the Great Geyser of Iceland in the miniature during a quiescent period.

We waited hours for action; and, worrying about our discomfort, someone invented the happy thought of spreading rugs from the busses from back to back of those standing. This took the wind out of the sails of the north wind, but increased the power of the Turkish bath to those sitting in the inside row, and even our clothing began to drip sweat.

For hours we watched and waited and told jokes on ourselves and the Geyser to fill in the time. Many of us thought the thing had gone off on one of its long vacations and would not return in time for us to get back to Reykjavik for the night. Sometime before our visit, the geyser refused to spout for the king of Denmark and Iceland, who was there on his annual vacation; so, why should it give a demonstration to a bunch of ordinary British tourists?

### **Safety Valve of Iceland.**

The Great Geyser of Iceland is intermittent and not continuous, as some may imagine. Its normal periods are every few days for about twenty minutes. It is a sort of safety valve of Iceland which goes off at a given pressure in the bowels of the earth somewhere, and the "funnel" is about eighty feet deep with a diameter of four feet or so. Were it not for this safety valve, installed by nature at some remote period of her history, Iceland might blow up at any moment.

In 1916 the geyser ceased to spout and the people began to fear they had lost their chief tourist attraction, but in the summer of 1935 it began again with renewed power and vigour. Since that time the development of tourist trade in Iceland took on a new lease of life, and "there are no visible signs that it will not keep on spouting for years or centuries to come." That is, if the soap holds out.

## **Soap Does the Work.**

We had been waiting for about five hours. Fifty per cent of us had retired to the busses to escape the cold wind, another percentage still persisted at the crater with a real Viking spirit and determination; the remainder moved about inspecting the sixty or more hot springs and miniature geysers in the vicinity. Some studied native methods of baking bread in the hot earth adjacent to the thermal springs. Half of us wanted to go home to warm our cold feet; the other half wanted to remain; and, in the deadlock we were at a standstill.

While we argued, however, about 100 pounds of good cake soap was thrown into the cauldron. This was supposed to loosen things up at the valve seat. Some said it was mere imagination, and a waste of good soap, but others had implicit faith that it would bring results.

Suddenly, however, there was a roar from the interior, a disturbance of the consomme in the twenty-five-foot-across soup plate, and a scramble of tourists from the edge of the crater. Boiling water was thrown out in every direction, a spout of steam went up into the air, and one girl of the party had her ankle scalded owing to delay in making her escape, which didn't prove too serious.

## **Monstrosity of Nature.**

At a safe distance we trained cameras on the phenomenon and hundreds of snaps must have been taken. A monstrosity

of nature was being performed and "doing its stuff" right before our eyes. We were eye-witnesses to one of the great wonders of the world.

When all the water had been thrown from the crater the geyser settled down to the real business of spouting steam, and we all crept back for a close inspection and a new thrill. Some said the spout was sixty feet high, some a hundred and others as high as two hundred feet. But we haven't all got the same idea of distance in height with the naked eye, and perhaps excitement lent enchantment to the mind in the interior of Iceland. One hundred feet might be a conservative estimate.

Close up, the four-foot funnel could be seen at the bottom of the bowl, and from the edge of the empty hollow, we could see the steam hissing from the enormous throttle and spouting high into the air like an abnormal exhaust from a giant engine.

The night was well advanced, although still light, when we left the Geyser with some regrets. It was about ten o'clock, and a few hours later we had midnight supper at the Laugarvatn hotel about half way to the capital. The hotel is a resort among the lava mountains and beside a beautiful lake.

We reached the Esja at Reykjavik about 2 a.m., and had an early "breakfast" before retiring for the remainder of the night. Our mode of transport was a fleet of three busses, the property of a Reykjavik company.

## CHAPTER IV.

### ICELAND IN THE MAKING.

Our Icelandic tour, besides being guests on the government "yacht" Esja, included excursions into the interior, and our adventure at the Great Geyser was only one of the most outstanding. They began with a sightseeing bus drive through the streets of Reykjavik, the capital of Iceland, on the afternoon of the memorable day on which we arrived. On that drive we picked up more information about Reykjavik and Iceland in general than is commonly known by aliens of the outside world.

The hand of welcome was extended to us at a light luncheon in a Reykjavik club hall of some kind by Mr. Raynar E. Kvaran, Manager, Information Department of the Statourist Bureau of Iceland, on the afternoon of our arrival.

Mr. Kvaran explained Iceland in detail in excellent English, and answered all questions, intelligent and otherwise, put by members of the party in the most cordial manner, which endeared him to our hearts long before the meeting came to an end.

### Reykjavik Has Birthday.

It so happened, by mere coincidence as it were, that the city of Reykjavik was celebrating its birthday on the very day of

our arrival, August 18th. We saw flags flying from poles, buildings and steamers, but it wasn't a demonstration in honour of our visit as the humorist of the party thought; it was Iceland eating, drinking and making merry, for on that day, 1,062 years ago, Mr. Ingolfur Arunarso laid the cornerstone of the city of Reykjavik. It was a great local outburst of patriotic pride that was filling the air and swelling the hearts of every person in Iceland; because, apart from Scotland, perhaps there is no country in the world that knows more about patriotism and love of country than Iceland. And this is the way Reykjavik was discovered, according to Stefan Stefansson, noted Iceland author:

It appears that Ingolfur was the first Scandinavian settler in Iceland, and he took up his residence at Reykjavik in defiance of the gods of the time. He sailed in the direction of Iceland and when he sighted land he threw his high-seat pillars overboard. Those pillars were a sort of household gods, and he avowed that he would settle down where the gods made them drift ashore. After a search of three years, the saga continues, his slaves found the pillars on shore and there was Reykjavik. This was in the year 874.

Great crowds had gathered on top of a grass covered moraine where stood the hero of the hour and day carved in bronze by a native sculptor, Einar Johnsson, to give expression to their thoughts. We took a snap of the gathering while the male choir sang national airs and the people cheered and applauded in the fullness of their hearts for Reykjavik.

And so Reykjavik has grown and grown from that one-man humble beginning to a city of some 36,000 Icelanders. It has

half the population of the island, the other half being scattered around the outer edges of Iceland in little fishing hamlets and villages. The nearest approach to Reykjavik in size is Hafnarfjordur, not many miles to the south.

The government of Iceland maintains a steamer service the year round that circumnavigates the island for the accommodation of those fishing villages, and many interesting tales of adventure are told of those schedules by sailors and passengers who have accompanied them. They are not without their hardships and dangers, chiefly along the north coast that touches the Arctic Circle, when perpetual darkness falls through the long winter months.

But Icelandic seamen have the blood of the early Vikings in their veins, and are born navigators. They are descendants of Eirikur the Red, who discovered and colonized Greenland, and they have no fear of the sea. The captain of the Esja proved this with his genial smile of confidence even in the most stormy weather, when some of us foolishly thought there might be danger of the boat going down.

Our headquarters while in Iceland on the four-day visit was on the Esja and there we roomed and boarded and made merry. The ship became our home sweet home; and there, in the long evenings, we would gather around in a real family circle in the dining room and sing songs, tell jokes, and play parlour games to our hearts' content.

## CHAPTER V.

### PROUD OF ITS HISTORY.

The Esja excursion people learned all they knew about Iceland from two very efficient, genial and obliging guides, Miss Anna Jonsson and Mr. Fredrik Bjornsson, who were supplied by the government to "take us around."

### Would Rather Guide Than Eat.

Miss Jonsson and Mr. Bjornsson spoke good English, a rare accomplishment in Iceland, and had good Scottish senses of humour that added spice to many of their tales about their native land. No doubt we bored them at times with silly but perhaps innocent questions that revealed our ignorance, but they both had the virtue of unlimited patience and many things were explained that were nearly inexplicable.

I think they both preferred to talk Iceland than to eat or sleep, as was demonstrated on some of our long excursions into the interior. Our indomitable guides were always last at the table, last to retire at night and first up in the morning. Iceland and its history and interests are foods on which the two live and that food is the mental and physical nourishment that keeps them both young and fit even beyond normally vigorous years.

## **Dreams of the Past.**

On one occasion we actually discovered Miss Jonsson sitting alone away up on a grassy hillside overlooking the plain of Thingvellir. She was communing with herself or with the spirits of her Viking ancestors who had frequented the spot in years gone by—what a downfall had overtaken Iceland since those days—she was seeing the great Chieftains standing on the "Logberg," or "Council Rock" delivering their orations, the multitude on the plain beneath; she was hearing the great cliff above and behind echoing its message to the assembly of the people in front and below; she heard old laws affirmed and new laws framed; she saw civil disputes judged and adjusted, criminal cases disposed of and criminals punished; new chiefs appointed, old ones retired or deposed. How simple it all was, how unanimous, how agreeable! How little it resembled the turmoil of an election, the forces of justice and the agonies of getting anywhere to-day!

At any rate, Anna awoke and came up out of the past when we climbed up the hill to disturb her dream, and she imparted all her knowledge to us unstintedly.

It appears that Thingvellir is a place of the oldest continuous parliament in the world. Thingvellir means "The plain of the parliament," and in historic interest it has few equals. Parliament was held there first in the year 930 and until 1798 when it was removed to Reykjavik. It was a sad day for Iceland when the old Althing came to an end after being in operation so many hundreds of years. A high cliff

behind the speakers echoed the voices across the plain below where they were distinctly heard by the assembly gathered from all the populated centres of Iceland.



THINGVELLIR: scene of the "Oldest Parliament in the World." Buildings shown are for tourist accommodation near scene of the "Althing" (Parliament) held there from the year 930 to 1798, when it was removed to Reykjavik. A high cliff echoed voices to the plain.

**THINGVELLIR: scene of the "Oldest Parliament in the World." Buildings shown are for tourist accommodation near scene of the "Althing" (Parliament) held there from the year 930 to 1798, when it was removed to Reykjavik. A high cliff echoed voices to the plain.**

Mr. Bjornsson held a mock parliament with a few of the party at which he offered his Viking son, "a very handsome man," to one of the most beautiful of our girls.

We visited the plain and tested the echo of the cliff for our own satisfaction and to prove what guides and books had told

us, and we can certainly vouch for it all.

There have never been any wars in Iceland. They were a defensive race in days gone by, but never fought battles. There was no occasion for civil war, and the country was never invaded by foreign armies. Duelling was abolished by an Act of Parliament in 1006.

Iceland is connected with Denmark only in having the same king. The two are ruled by the same monarch, but he is king of Iceland and king of Denmark separately, and not both together.

"Iceland is now a Constitutional Monarchy," says Stefen Stefansson, "its administrative government being vested in a cabinet consisting of three ministers, who are responsible to the Althingi (legislative assembly). The present Althingi is composed of forty-two members, divided into two chambers—the upper house consisting of fourteen members and the lower house of twenty-eight. The members are elected under a very comprehensive form of universal suffrage."

## **CHAPTER VI.**

### **WHO DISCOVERED AMERICA?**

If you are a Canadian or a citizen of the United States, "don't never" go to Iceland and let on that Christopher

Columbus discovered America in 1492, because he didn't. America was discovered by the late Leifur Eirikur, of Iceland, son of Eirikur the Red, who found "Wineland the Good," alias America, said to be Florida, in the year A.D. 1000. His renowned Red father had already colonized Greenland in 986, and it was a mere step from there to Wineland.

To prove all this, there is a statue of Leifur in one of the public places at Reykjavik. And if you are still in doubt and stand up for Columbus, read the Icelandic saga (historic and traditional stories of that far north island) and be convinced. All this can readily be understood when it is reasoned that Iceland is only 200 miles from Greenland, and is really part of the western rather than the eastern hemisphere.

Moral: Don't gloat too much over Columbus when you are in Iceland. It's just as well to leave him at home until you return.

Arctic Iceland has many natural resources besides the famous Eirikurs. It has the Great Geyser. But the geyser isn't a natural resource as we understand it—but it is to Iceland. It is one of the greatest tourist attractions in the world, and can be sold in that way if it can't be exported. Great efforts are being made to develop tourist trade in Iceland, and when this has been accomplished it will be one of the nation's biggest assets.

**A Glory of Its Own.**

Iceland's thermal springs, its great waterfalls—the Gullfoss, the Skogafoss, the Godafoss, the Dettifoss—that rival the world for their natural beauty and wonder—its great volcanic mountains, immense glaciers, still living volcano, Mount Hekla; and its greener grass, sturdier heather, its timid little wild flowers, and innumerable "blaeberries," all give Iceland a glory of its own that can't be found in any other country in the world.

Iceland's best natural resource is its great fishing industry. Species of fish are numerous, cod, haddock and ling being the chief catches. Those are caught both by home and foreign trawlers, the markets being mainly in Europe. Local trawlers take fish direct to Scotland and return loaded with coal, I understand, and that may be a reason Scottish coal is about as cheap in Iceland as it is in Scotland.

### **Hot Springs Life of Iceland.**

But Reykjavik is solving the heat problem independently from Scottish coal, and plans are under way at present to heat the entire city from hot springs in the vicinity. These springs are already being utilized for a great many domestic and commercial purposes. They are used for cooking, washing and for heating hotels and home in the interior, and for raising of tropical and other plants under glass. At Reykir, away inland, I saw tomatoes and grapes grown commercially, the market being Reykjavik and other cities; and in the same hot bed were geraniums, begonias, and many other similar plants,

the heat being supplied through piping from a large hot spring near by.

There are whales, walrus and seals in Iceland waters. No permission is necessary to shoot foxes, the only wild animal in Iceland, the chief difficulty is finding them. They are very destructive to sheep, a sort of artificial natural resource in the island.

Polar bear pay occasional visits on Arctic ice floes, but they are not native. Reindeer were taken to Iceland from Norway in 1771, and at present it is estimated about 700 survive. There are 100 different species of birds, half being aquatic. Ptarmigan and swans are plentiful. Birds of prey such as the eagle and falcon are getting scarce.

## **CHAPTER VII.**

### **OUT IN THE WILDS.**

Our good guide, Miss Jonsson, cautioned us in favour of warm clothing before venturing into the wilds of Iceland where we were to see some of the wonders of the natural world. The advice was especially offered the ladies of the party, and I think it was taken by all those who put comfort before style. It was the voice of one with experience, and we appreciated the forethought on all our excursions.

Three busses of eighteen "fathenger" (passenger) capacity each conveyed us to the various centres of interest inland over good, bad and indifferent roads. And it made no difference whether we rode with our feet on the floor or our heads on the ceiling, we spiced the interior with community songs we had brought from England, Scotland and Canada. Between songs we interrogated the guides with more or less intelligent inquiries about strange things we saw and strange words we heard, and in this agreeable atmosphere we engaged the pleasant hours to our destinations, and learned the past and present history and the language of Iceland at one and the same time.

### **Out of the Ocean.**

We were told, although that didn't appear necessary, that Iceland was one of the oldest countries in the world. Iceland came up from the bottom of the Arctic Ocean so long B.C. that the exact date has been forgotten by everybody, and it had been pushed up and built by volcanic actions and disturbances of some kind. We were shown at least one volcano—Mount Hekla—and several extinct craters as proof of all this, and to demonstrate what pride Iceland had in its humble beginning as well as in the historic origin of its children.

To those who doubted there was still evidence in great bleak, bare, treeless basaltic mountains piercing the sky, huge lava stones scattered here and there over the wide plains, surface remains of molten lava flow distorted and evidently caught in the process of cooling, and fertile flats completely

or partially covered and clothed with peat, grass, heather and other typical vegetation—seeing was indeed believing.

Although we saw some wash gravel that didn't constitute pebbles of volcanic origin, gravel of any kind is scarce in Iceland, and isolated deposits may have migrated with icebergs or glaciers at very remote times from foreign countries further north.

### **No Need for Alarm.**

We gave Hekla a wide berth to be on the safe side, because there are no roads leading to the volcano, and it wasn't active at the time of our visit. Neither did we feel quite at ease to see great jets and clouds of steam coming from the bowels of the earth right from under our feet as it were. However, we had the assurance and the personal guarantee of our guides that there was little likelihood of Nature resuming operations in the immediate present. They seemed convinced that we would get back to our Esja home and Reykjavik without being drenched with lava or tossed about with an earth tremor. A million years of peace wasn't to be broken that day, and our guides' faith in the Iceland gods' quiescence for the time being at least inoculated us with that courage and confidence all people should have when they visit Iceland.

It wouldn't be fair to omit that in Iceland lava rock of many colour schemes are used for decorative purposes in the homes and home grounds. Thus employed, when tastefully arranged, lava gives an attraction and setting to Iceland's domestic life

that is distinctly Icelandic. Lava stone is a valuable asset for useful as well as ornamental purposes in Iceland. It is the chief material used for road foundation work, it goes into all stone walls, and is used as flagstones for the drying of fish along the sea coast. Many acres of flat land are floored at strategic places with such stone for that purpose. When we realize that basaltic is the only rock they have in Iceland, we can readily understand its popularity.

## **CHAPTER VIII.**

### **BACK TO REYKJAVIK.**

It mustn't be forgotten that while the author of these adventures was taking notes, mentally, physically and otherwise for his story, one of the passengers was "shooting" movies of the entire trip. These pictures came in very handy at a reunion of the party a month or so afterwards in Glasgow when the photographer kindly projected his film on a screen and we not only saw "ourselves as others see us," but had the opportunity to retrace our steps through Iceland.

**Small World.**

Miss "Ygersson" wasn't a part of the wilds of Iceland although we found her there. She was more of modern Iceland, because she spoke good English, a rare accomplishment as yet up there, and that aroused our curiosity. Employed as a waitress in an inn at the Gullfoss, about one hundred miles inland from Reykjavik, she seemed a bit out of place, might have had more elevated employment and been more profitably engaged.

The girl had acquired her knowledge of English in Kelowna, British Columbia, Canada. Time didn't permit us going too deeply into the girl's private history, but she may have been born in Kelowna, attended school there and moved to Iceland with her parents. At least she had lived ten years in Kelowna, had many friends there; it seemed to narrow the world a bit more meeting a person in the interior of Iceland who had lived so near my own home in Canada.

"Did you learn English in Iceland schools?" I asked the girl.

"No, I learned it in Canada."

"Canada! What part of Canada?"

"British Columbia."

"Oh, what part of British Columbia?"

"Kelowna."

"My! My!"

## **The Gullfoss.**

The Gullfoss is only one of the great waterfalls in Iceland, "foss" being equivalent to falls, and gull being Icelandic for gold—The Golden Falls. Iceland can truly boast some of the grandest in the world, and the Gullfoss ranks second in Iceland, the Dettifoss being the largest and most beautiful. Although we weren't fortunate enough to see others, the Gullfoss is typical, and a surprise to the whole party. It rivals Niagara both in volume and vatn (water) and in the magnificence of its setting. It is the falls of a river fed from some of the great glaciers of Iceland, and goes over in two leaps—steps and stairs as it were—and disappears in a cloud of spray into a deep chasm beyond reach of the camera or tourist. You cannot stand at the foot of the Gullfoss the way you can at the foot of Niagara and admire its colossal grandeur with spray falling on you like rain.

One evening we were entertained at the expense of the steamship company in one of Reykjavik's most popular restaurants where tea and coffee were served; and music, including Iceland's national anthem, was added to what proved a very pleasant and agreeable farewell to the party from Iceland. At this gathering presentations were made to the guides who had been so untiring in their efforts to make our holiday as enjoyable and happy as it was possible to be.

One of the most interesting and instructive attractions in Reykjavik is an exhibition of the works of the noted Icelandic sculptor, Mr. Einar Johnsson. There is a building in Reykjavik

devoted to this renowned artist's work alone. It was he who carved the statue of Thorfinnur Karlsefni, "the Icelander who was first of all white men to attempt to colonize America" long before Columbus. The statue is in Fairmont Park, Philadelphia, and was unveiled in 1920.

### **American Cars.**

The busses that took us into the interior were of the left-hand drive style, although the rule of the road in Iceland is the same as in the British Isles. The United States has captured the Iceland market for motor cars, and most cars there are American makes. There is no steamer communication between the United States and Iceland, but it reminded one of Canada to see the familiar Chevs, Nashes, Cadillacs, Buicks, etc. There were many Fords that may have been British made, although they were all equipped with the left-hand drive.

The Statourist office in Reykjavik exists for the accommodation of the tourists. It is a sort of travellers' home and rest room. There the lost stranger may be directed back to the fold, and if you lose anything, it will be found there. You can't make them sore by abuse, and you can buy post cards, souvenirs, stamps, stationery, and write your letters in the Statourist office. It's for your use and there it is near the wharf with sign boards pointing the way, and you can't go astray.

## CHAPTER IX.

### ICELAND NOT SO DIFFERENT.

Mental pictures of Iceland are not always very flattering to Iceland. Mine was a vast plain covered with snow and ice to the very water's edge, a few fishermen's shacks huddled together close to the shore, and the visiting tourist or Arctic explorer was met by a sled drawn by a pack of Eskimo dogs and men clad in heavy furs.

But that is all wrong. Iceland isn't so different from any other civilized country. Iceland has its capital in the city of Reykjavik, a town of about 36,000 people. There are dry docks there and one of the finest harbours in the world. The city has paved streets and sidewalks, electric street lighting, telephone, homes, schools, churches, businesses, shops, factories, banks, hotels, movies, newspapers, institutions of various kinds, a broadcasting station, parliament buildings, public parks, museums, colleges, etc. Reykjavik owns and operates its own public utilities and its domestic water and light services are second to none in the world. We had daily programmes on the Esja, both going and coming, from the broadcasting station in Reykjavik.

#### **In Advance of Other Cities.**

There are no railways in Iceland because nearly all its transport is by sea, all settlements of any importance being

along the sea coast; and there are no trams in Reykjavik. But that does not matter, because the tram car is just about extinct at the present time, and in this respect Iceland is far in advance of any other modern city. Reykjavik has an excellent bus service that not only covers the city, but is interurban and reaches away out into the interior.

Reykjavik has its police and its jail, but has few prisoners. Jail is a sort of emergency institution, I understand, and there has never been a murder committed in the city. "We have no reason to kill each other," one of our guides told us. There is no prison accommodation for the ladies of Iceland because such has never been found necessary. I am not bringing this down from Iceland as a reflection on our own ladies, because even among ourselves they are ninety-nine and nine-tenths per cent good.

Perhaps a tragedy with Iceland is its lack of trees, and such things as woods or forests are unknown. But this is made up in part by the greenness of its grass and the profusion of its heather and blaeberry bushes. The mountain ash decorating many of the home grounds is an importation. The same applies to the red currant which is used very freely as hedges around homes, ornamental in gardens, and for the berry that was in its pink of maturity at the time of our visit. Many hardy and Arctic flowering plants decorate Icelandic homes and grounds, and the rock garden seemed to be a favourite. One lady we visited in one of Iceland's ideal homes had sweet peas growing, climbing and blossoming inside one of her large windows facing the south; so that necessity is the mother of invention even up in Iceland; and this lady had solved the problem in her own unique way.

## CHAPTER X.

### WEIGHING ANCHOR.

On Saturday, August 23rd, at eight o'clock in the evening, after four days of absolute abandon in the wilds, and enjoying the hospitalities of Iceland, the expedition made preparations for the return journey to Glasgow, and the crew of the *Esja* made ready to weigh anchor.

Of course there were the usual preliminaries among members of the party before sailing—the hustle and bustle of getting on board at the eleventh hour, last moment gift purchases for loved ones at home, heart-rending partings from guides; tears, lamentations, smiles, kisses, promises to write, etc. There was also the introduction and farewell, in one breath, as it were, to the noted Icelandic writer, Mr. Stefan Stefansson, who had come to the wharf with his daughter, maybe to glean copy for his next novel, and with whom we would have enjoyed a longer interview. And then we sailed out of the harbour into the teeth of the storm with mental pictures of wet sheets and flowing seas, although the *Esja* unfurled no sails like Viking ships of old. Her sea-worthiness was remarkable; timbers shivered, but she never lost heart or balance and breasted the storm and waves like a sea monster that had defied the elements for ages and would not drown.

## Happy Environments.

There is something in environment that will make a person happy or otherwise; and, when one has the faculty of adjusting oneself to a happy environment, one too, may be happy. And that was the philosophy that gripped the jolly company on the S.S. Esja, and we prepared to make ourselves happy to pass away the hours just as informally as possible.

Out on the open sea committees framed social programmes for the return journey. These were to include songs, recitations, readings, masquerades, deck games, and amusements for morning, noon and night. Dancing was taboo because the dining tables were immovable and the lounge room had only accommodation for one or two couples. But "the best laid schemes of mice and men, etc." holds good now as it did in Burns' day. This time, however, it wasn't the plow but the dread monster Seasickness. Our immunity wasn't so immune as expected, and the alibi was a more boisterous sea than on the journey north.

Shortly after leaving the Vestmann Islands, where a few of us might have had a Robinson Crusoe experience but for the forethought of our parson, one of the party, who awaited our arrival on the jetty, the sea took on one of those angry moods that even oil will not soothe, and our programme had to be postponed to await the whim of the waves. All local talent was under the weather and in no frame of mind to sing or write poetry.

A few of the party had climbed one of the highest peaks of Vestmann, where they discovered an extinct crater covered with grass. The Alpine view was grand, but they nearly missed the Esja.

The Vestmann Islands are south of Iceland, a calling point for steamers en route from Reykjavik to Scotland, and the only occupation of the inhabitants is fishing. A little town has a fine harbour locked in by cliffs a thousand or more feet high, sheep grazing on the precipitous edges of their grass-clothed, sloping summits, and aquatic birds perching on ledges wherever footing could be found. The town has electric light, but the villagers draw domestic water from the wells in the good old-fashioned way. The English tongue appears to be unknown there, and trollers take fish from the surrounding waters to European markets.

### **Business As Usual.**

For two days and two nights the sea raged, wind howled and whistled through the rigging, and waves threatened to eat the Esja alive. It took courage to believe that all was well, but the captain said it was O.K., and assured us it was nothing, so we put our trust in—the captain. After that and the storm it was business as usual and our programme was resumed where it was broken off at the beginning. As may be imagined, however, we could only put on a remnant of what had been planned because two valuable days had been lost fighting Neptune and the demon of the ocean, seasickness, with one and the same breath at one and the same time.



"Bringing in the Sheaves." This is the method of harvesting hay in Iceland. Hay is cut when only about six inches tall, and is used chiefly for feeding sheep during the winter. Grass seems greener and wool whiter in Iceland than in any other country. In years without much snow, sheep may graze out on the hills all winter.

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## **CHAPTER XI.**

## **COMMUNITY SPIRIT ON THE ESJA.**

Being a small company, there wasn't a great deal of outstanding "local" talent on the Esja, but the most daring of us offered "selections" and guaranteed to do our best when approached by the canvassing committee. No suspicion of oratory was asked for or anticipated, and all and sundry was accepted without credentials of any kind. The reward was applause as loud as any Harry Lauder or Ramsay MacDonald could earn under similar circumstances, and there never was a more proud cast on any stage over its achievements.

As half a loaf is better than no bread, so was half of our programme better than none, after patients were convalescent and the sea had got on its good behaviour. So the last two days saw more programme crushed into the least possible dimensions than even the most optimistic had dared hope for.

### **Cosmopolitan Masquerade.**

A fancy dress parade included the Canadian, naturally, in Dr. Dafoe; and the famous Quins, lacking Canadian material, made up of five English and Scottish lassies among the passengers; who, by the way, originated the plot. A Cook's tour agent doing Iceland with his gang, a Sheik from the Punjab of India, and many other colour schemes of the globe, made up an entire entertainment, which, if it lacked talent and skill, had no lack of enthusiasm. All in all, our masquerade was the most cosmopolitan ever staged on board an Iceland

boat to our knowledge; and the skill it required to put over the amateur programme couldn't have been bettered even with the same talent under the same conditions.

Most "talent" trembled like an aspen leaf—all honour to their names—when they got up to do their bit with an unpremeditated reading, or other surprise that astonished themselves no less than it did the tolerant audience, but the response gave them courage to remain on their feet to the finish, and the enthusiasm was genuine, because it was any port in a storm.

### **Poets to the Rescue.**

The company, as usual, wasn't without its poets. We had the ordinary Burns and Shakespeare types of poets, but there were others who composed poetry neither Burns or Shakespeare ever wrote. The most outstanding was a minister among the passengers, mentioned before, who composed out of some carefully chosen words, a poem in praise of ourselves entitled: "We Are a Jolly Company," and an ode to Iceland's famous sculptor, Mr. Einar Jonsson; but the best of all was a collection of poets and poetesses who wrote a delightful parody, "Rolling on to Iceland," which will be a classic so long as any of us remain alive to pass it on to relatives or friends. It will always be notorious because it has perpetuated the names of those who made themselves most popular or most annoying throughout the long, but all too short, enjoyable holiday.

I regret the poem is of too personal a nature to be used in a book being published for general distribution. This also applies to names that have been changed or omitted altogether in preparing the story for book form.

Skipping rope was popular among the grownups lacking the necessary juvenile material; and reels, foursomes and treasure hunts on deck, with parlour games in the evenings, filled in time that otherwise would have been lost had it not been taken by the forelock.

### **Not All Skipping.**

But the Esja excursion to and from Iceland wasn't all skipping and masquerading. It had its tragedies because there were the parting moments, and some hearts had actually to be torn asunder at the parting. The end came all too soon, but we are not altogether lost; it has compensation perhaps in lasting friendships; we have each other's names and addresses; and failing that, in an emergency, there is always the post office and the phone.

At any rate, Iceland as a tourist attraction is fast coming to the fore, and efforts are being made by the government of Iceland to develop this trade that has hitherto remained dormant. Along this line she has assets of inestimable value in her very remoteness and isolation, her historic connection with the American continent, her geological aloofness, her contradictions of surface ice and thermal springs, her rugged primitiveness, her furthest north modern civilization; and

perhaps no other country more than Iceland could inspire the following lines:

Space awes me with its distance,  
Time crows me with its age;  
Of all their vast volumes, I know  
Scarce a page.

## **CHAPTER XII.**

### **A COUNTRY WITHOUT A RAILWAY.**

We have often heard of a man without a country, but perhaps few of us have ever heard of a country without a railway.

Citizens of the Dominion who are proud of their network of government and privately owned railways, who have more miles of railway per capita than any other country in the world, and who are accustomed to daily or twice daily trains, east and west or north and south through their respective towns or cities, can scarcely visualize a country that has no railways at all. Yet that is exactly what the Canadian tourist finds when he visits the little kingdom of Iceland that never had a railway, and doesn't even need nor want one.

There are cliffs in the interior of Iceland, in the famed "Oldest Parliament in the World" district, that echoed the

voices of chiefs and legislators for hundreds of years to the plains below, where subjects of Iceland had congregated to make laws and be governed, but those cliffs have never echoed the whistle of a locomotive. There are children and grown people in Iceland who have never heard that familiar sound, or seen a train except in the movies.

But Iceland couldn't use a railway if she had one. A railway would be an accommodation that would never be able to make good. There are no towns or cities in the interior that could pay running expenses, let alone construction costs of a railroad, and settlements along the coast can be reached and served far more economically by boat.

### **Descendants of Fearless Vikings.**

Those settlements are the homes and haunts of Iceland's fishermen who have made Iceland famous for its fine, wholesome fish and inexhaustible fishing grounds. Ships carry supplies to those fishermen and their families summer and winter and bring out fish—fresh, cured, dried—to the markets of Europe.

Iceland has perhaps the most seaworthy steamships in the world to-day. They are manned by descendants of the fearless Viking seamen of old who braved the ancient northern oceans and who discovered America long before Christopher Columbus was born, and they are equally as fearless as their renowned ancestors. This can readily be imagined when we understand what it means to circumnavigate Iceland in the

dead of winter fighting snow, ice, cold, wind, rain, wave, blizzard and perpetual darkness in the north along the rim of the Arctic circle.

Thus there is at least one country in the world to-day that has no railways or trains, and doesn't need nor want them.

## **CHAPTER XIII.**

### **CHINOOK.**

No Western Canadian would ever expect that British Columbia's "native" tongue, "Chinook," would turn up on a boat from Glasgow to Iceland. But it did that very thing in a very unexpected way on the Esja, and this is how it happened:

One of the passengers had a copy of Robert W. Service's poems among his dunnage. He brought the volume out one day, and was so enthused with the story of "Dangerous Dan McGrew" that he wasn't satisfied reading about Dan to himself in silence, but had to read the poem aloud to the Captain and a group of other passengers who had gathered in the lounge.

Now, during the course of his reading, he came across the foreign word, "Cheechako," and everybody, of course, wanted to know what that meant. With some pride I came to the rescue with the interpretation that it meant a stranger in a

strange land, and for a while I was the hero of the moment as a linguist.

But when they came across the feminine word, "klootchman," and I explained that she was an Indian woman, or a white man's Indian wife, my stock in the language monger business mounted to the skies. After that I translated every Chinook word, male, female and neuter, as they occurred in the poem.

And now it is up to me to explain just what Chinook is. There is such a thing as a chinook wind that rises suddenly on the prairie and in the Rocky Mountains and clears the country of snow and ice in a few hours, but that's not the Chinook we are after.

Chinook is a jargon that was spoken between various tribes of Indians on the Pacific Coast before the arrival of the white man. It was used as a trade language by those Indians for the purpose of their commerce, one important trade said to have been in slaves from tribes at the mouth of the Columbia river in exchange for "shell money" from the Nootka Indians on the west coast of Vancouver Island. The Chinook Indians lived at the mouth of the Columbia river in Oregon, but the origin of the jargon appears to be unknown. It is a mixture of words from various tribe languages, and in time a number of the more simple English and French words were added.

When the explorers, navigators and traders arrived at the west coast, they adopted Chinook as a medium of communication with the Indians, and in time the jargon extended itself up the coast to Alaska, and west across country to the Rockies.

Father LeJeune, of Kamloops, translated Chinook into shorthand which he taught the Indians in his diocese, so that they might communicate with each other by correspondence. Later he published a paper which he called "Kamloops Wawa" and distributed among the Indians. LeJeune was born in Brittany, France, in 1855, and died in 1930.

There is a Chinook version of the Gospel According to St. Mark, said to have been translated by the Rev. Tate of the former Methodist Church. It is used by the British and Foreign Bible Society in British Columbia.

Chinook was used by the Hudson's Bay Company and other traders in the west, and was very popular between whites and Indians throughout the interior of British Columbia up to the end of the last century.

## **CHAPTER XIV.**

### **POETRY AND BOTANY.**

The personal nature of the poetry produced on the Esja forbids its being printed in a book published for general distribution. However, much of it is interesting only because it was composed by ourselves about ourselves. The parson among us had some talent along that line, and could have done far better had more time been devoted to its construction. There was room for improvement in his "Jolly

Company" both in measure and rhyme, but it served its purpose at our farewell concert.

Most poetry must be written ten to twenty times, and often over a period of years before it is dressed up fit to appear in public. Only the hard boiled poet knows this. However, the verses revealed the emotion that filled the heart of the writer for the companions he found himself among on that memorable visit to Iceland.

But he rose to a higher level of poetic expression in a sonnet to the late Einer Jonsson, noted Icelandic sculptor, after a visit to the Einer Jonsson museum at Reykjavik, if we overlook the rhyme and rhythm, and here it is:

### **EINAR JONSSON.**

By Rev. M. MacLennan MacLeod, M.D., B.D.

We visit the Einar Jonsson Museum at Reykjavik, on the  
17th of August, 1936.

Great Sculptor of the North, Einar Jonsson!  
It did me good to see creative art  
Like yours so strong and pure in every part,  
And find poetic thought set out in stone;  
To learn how, in your youth, you went alone  
Ere you would yield to those who sought to chart,  
Your course for ever constant to the mart  
For which your growing genius was not prone.  
Today you know, within your loved Iceland,  
Your work acknowledged and your name esteemed.  
Perhaps you seek no greater meed of praise;

But I, with all who viewed the works your hand,  
Has wrought—and after you have dreams, new-  
dreamed—

Would wish the world could on your sculpture gaze.

"Rolling on to Iceland," by a group of young poets who recited their composition at our final concert the night before we landed home at Glasgow, was less serious, but more popular, because it "embraced," and had a "crack" at most of us.

## **BOTANY.**

Our Icelandic expedition mixed business with pleasure, and wasn't without its research work with some, in the interests of science. Mr. J. R. Lee, cousin to the author, and his friend, Mr. Robert McLean, both of Glasgow and well known in Glasgow botanical circles, botanized in the parts of Iceland we were fortunate enough to have included in our itinerary, and among other plant species found some rare specimens including a few Arctic mosses.

Later, Mr. Lee read a very interesting and instructive paper on the subject to members of the Glasgow and Andersonian Natural History and Microscopical Society in the Royal Technical College, Glasgow, which not only dealt in some detail with the Iceland flora, but gave a brief and interesting outline of the expedition as well.

Mr. Lee is author of several papers on the subject of botany read to the above Society, and a number of them have been published.

The End.

The statement on a fly leaf of this book that my aim was to tell the truth, has bearing only on the truth of the story in general as opposed to fiction, and is not a guarantee that no mistakes have been made in gathering the material together in such a short space of time. To the best of my knowledge all statements made are correct.—Author.

# ACROSS CANADA BY RAIL

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## I.

### TRAINS FASTER—MORE COMFORTABLE.

We are told that trains are faster and more comfortable today than they have ever been before. And when you go joy-

riding on one you soon realize the fact without being told; by the way they eat up the miles with the fewest possible jolts or come-backs. This may be the reason more people are doing their travelling by train, and it may be that we can't meet payments on the car any more.

Anyway, trains are faster and more comfortable, because a great deal of improvement has been done to rolling stock and road beds in the past few years that has cut resistance and vibration down to a minimum.

### **Passengers Go to Sleep.**

An experience on the C.N.R. between Jasper and Edmonton recently will illustrate this. We all had refreshments at Jasper—those who paid for what they didn't get and those who got what they didn't pay for, because we were so many from the train, the girls couldn't handle the crowd—and when the train departed those on our coach were seized with a sort of miniature sleeping sickness. It may have been the food, but train officials will tell you it was the comfort and the lulling motion of the coach.

At any rate, for an hour or two there was a dead calm and silence in the crowded coach, because nearly everyone fell asleep. Some slept sitting up, while others adopted the more conventional method of "stretching" themselves out in their seats. Those who did not sleep had no one to talk to and the silence was broken only by the muffled clang of steel wheels on steel rails.

Passenger trains are running now to capacity, and we no longer have a coach nearly all to ourselves. We are lucky to get single rather than double seats, and men are lucky if they haven't to share seats with a lady, and vice-versa.

### **Railway Official Courtesy.**

I don't know whether it is good wages, good training, good manners, or good common sense that makes C.N.R. employees and officials so courteous to the company's patrons. It may be that they understand the people own the railway that it is the people who pay them, and that the voice of the people has some weight, although many of our public servants don't look at it in that way.

Nevertheless, rail officials are sociable and polite as well as courteous. They not only answer silly questions and otherwise, but answer them civilly and look for more to answer. They can't go too far out of their way to oblige cranky patrons, and their care of any flock they may have in charge at least assures safe delivery at one's destination. And here is an example:

When our eastbound passenger arrived at Capreol from Winnipeg, recently, where Toronto passengers had to change trains, there was difficulty getting up a high step into the Toronto coach, but the trainman came to the rescue:

"Come on folks to the other end, the step isn't so high there."

That is C.N.R. care and guardianship, and we all followed him like a Sunday school picnic. I found the same courtesy, when I chased a train at Montreal. A porter re-opened the door and salvaged me with much the same fatherly affection. Trainmen on the C.N. have an instinct that makes them one of the family, and you are just out of luck if you don't take advantage of their courtesies. It is just one of those touches of kindness that makes the whole world kin.

### **Pool Trains.**

In the east we have what are known as "Pool Trains." These are made up of a combination of C.P. and C.N. schedules, and were brought about by the elimination of duplication services where it was found one train would serve the purpose. This meant economy to the railways and just as good accommodation for the public.

The pool train is a sort of community effort on the part of the railway companions, and there are some instances where one line has ceased to operate in favour of the other. In such cases the one company honours the other's tickets. In fact, over one section of the railway I actually travelled C.P.R. on my C.N. advertising pass. And you have to go some to beat a community spirit like that.

## II.

### **DOING EDMONTON IN A HURRY.**

When you get up in the morning after having arrived in Edmonton late the night before, you find yourself completely turned around; that is, your face is where the back of your head should be, and vice versa, and the North Saskatchewan river is running the wrong way along its course.

But if you are a bit of an astronomer you will consult with the sun and find that the geography is right and you are wrong. You have been standing on the north side of the river looking south, and not at the south looking north, having crossed over in your sleep or unawares in the train the day before.

### **Los Angeles of Canada.**

Edmonton might be called the Los Angeles of Canada, it is scattered out so, and is a bit hard on the public utility pocket book. In fact, it covers the whole of Edmonton and then some, has a population of 79,197 (1931 census), owns all its own utilities—street cars, water power and light—and has over 120 each streets and avenues running criss-cross like a crossword puzzle. It is the capital of Alberta, and the home of Mr. Aberhart of Social Credit fame when he is working for Alberta.

Alberta has a liquor act similar to the one in British Columbia, with the exception that the beer parlours call it "Drinks" and not "Open," as they do in B.C., which is more to the point.

Edmonton's chief worry is getting gravel for road surfacing. Up to the present time it has been dragged from the bed of the river and crushed, but recently someone has discovered "natural" gravel just outside the city limits.

### **The Troopers Arrive.**

The largest concentration of troops ever assembled in the province since 1914-18, gathered at Calgary recently for a demonstration of some kind, and on Saturday evening, July 4th, we all went up to the C.P.R. depot to welcome the Edmonton Units back home. They lined up in formation at the station; and, accompanied by the two regimental bands, pipes and brass instruments, marched to the armories via Jasper avenue, 104th street and 101st avenue. But the proudest people in Edmonton that evening were the Scots as we marched abreast of the kiltie band. The skirl o' the pipes fair sent a thrill o' patriotism running up and doon oor spinal columns.

### **No Rodeo Instinct.**

There is none of the rodeo instinct in the people of Edmonton; they leave all that to Calgary. They have no real cowboys with five-gallon hats and things, and when they put on a show it is confined solely to an exhibition of stock and produce. The stampede that takes up so much time at other cities is not known in Edmonton. It is not a cowboy country, mixed farming being the chief industry. The city has a splendid exhibition ground covering many acres on the northern outskirts, with numerous fine buildings for exhibition purposes.

Next in importance appears to be coal mining. They generate their own power with steam, and what coal remains after that consumption is exported in all directions. The mining of gravel for road surfacing is very expensive. Explorations are made of the bottom of the river when the water is low and the richest deposits are mined until exhausted. The finding of a "natural" gravel pit may eliminate the drag-net operations.

### **River Getting Lower.**

I am told the North Saskatchewan river is drying up. One fellow said they used to "sail" ships up the river, but that can't be done now. The source of supply in the Rockies must be getting scarce, he thought. He never saw the river so low, and even during the big June high water it only rose a few feet. It is predicted that fifty years from now prairie rivers will be mere babbling brooks.

Prairie rivers running east are fed entirely from the Rockies, they have no tributaries worthy of the name on their way to the Great Lakes, so that they depend entirely on the mountains for their supply of water. Like the Fraser they are limey from washing through silt deposits, and all the prairie cities have to filter their domestic and bath water.

### **The Midnight Sun.**

Edmonton may not be located near the Arctic circle, but it certainly has long daylight saving in the summer months. At 8.45 p.m. in early July, the sun was still shining there, at 9 o'clock it still touched tops of high buildings, and at 10 p.m. there was still a trace of daylight.

You can't beat the sun up in the morning in Edmonton, so no one knows just when it rises. However, one who was daring enough to sit up all night so he could get up that early, told Edmonton daylight begins at 2 a.m., and they all believed it.

### **III.**

## **DOWN THE COULEE.**

You walk out of the back yard, cross an alley, pass a barn and find yourself at the head of a trail leading down into the coulee. A short walk on a zig-zag trail down a narrow ravine carpeted with prairie grass, takes you to the basin of Old Man river at Lethbridge, Alberta. You are in a coulee a mile wide, and above you for hundreds of miles stretches the level prairie on all sides.

### **Bridge Over Mile Wide.**

The coulee is crossed by a C.P.R. steel bridge one mile and forty-seven feet long and 307 feet high above the river. The river is not so large as one might imagine from the dimensions of its channel, being a stream only about one hundred feet wide where children swim and cross without danger.

The water of Old Man river is of a limey composition like the Fraser river in British Columbia and is not the best for drinking and swimming. It rises in the Rockies and gathers its lime after it has left the mountains. In due course it empties into the Bow River which flows into the Saskatchewan.

To get away from the uninviting Old Man river water, the people of Lethbridge created an artificial lake on the prairie within the city limits some years ago where boating and swimming were enjoyed; but, of late years, this pond became infested with weeds making both impossible, or at least unpleasant, and to-day it is practically abandoned. As a result of this disappointment the people are now turning their

attention to the natural resources of the Old Man river and its coulee for their swimming, bathing and other summer time recreations.

For many years the people of Lethbridge didn't realise the beauty that the coulee resort offered. Now it is a favourite picnic and recreation ground where all sorts of amusements are carried on. There are natural shrubs and trees that take one's mind away from the monotony of the prairie. It is more and more being regarded as an asset to the city as Stanley park is to the city of Vancouver, B.C.

Lethbridge does not drink its water in the raw—that would be a menace to public health, besides being unpleasant to taste—so they purify their supply in a plant in the coulee near the bank of the river, and when water is drawn from the tap it is pure and wholesome. The sewerage water is also purified before it is returned to the river. Thus the water of the Old Man is washed clean when it is taken out and before it is put back.

The power plant that supplies light as well as water to the city has its own coal mine for fuel power in the bank of the coulee. Coal is mined from tunnels just as required (a narrow-gauge railway running from the coal seam to the furnace). Both plant and mine are the property of the city and operating costs are very low.

### **Coulee Geology.**

It doesn't take a geologist to read the geology of the Old Man river coulee, and the prairie in the neighbourhood of Lethbridge. In fact this might apply to the whole of the Canadian prairie. Without touching at the beginning of things, there was first an impenetrable forest which was the origin of the coal seams, a catastrophe of some kind, the bottom of an immense ocean or huge island sea or lake, and then the prairie that was once the bottom of such lake or sea. Then grass began to grow and for centuries its vegetable mould has formed the rich loam that now produces the finest wheat grown in any part of the world.

Down the coulee seams may be traced running horizontally fifty or so feet below the prairie floor. Coal seams vary in width, and their slate walls, I understand, are rich in fossil remains of plants and animals. Overlying the coal beds are deposits of gravel and silt that were placed there by Nature long before the carboniferous age that was responsible for the great bodies of coal underlying them.

The mile-wide coulee reminds us that in past times it was the channel of a mighty river much larger than the Old Man is to-day. That would be the time when glaciers were fast disappearing from the Rocky Mountains and the Arctic Circle was creeping back to its present location.

There are a few settlements and cultivated plots down the coulee, but its chief attractions are its primitive surroundings and in that atmosphere the people of Lethbridge escape from the strain of city life, relax and take life less seriously evenings and holidays. The coulee is a playground for the young and old of Lethbridge.

## IV.

### **MRS. RHODES HAD HER TROUBLES.**

When the C.N.R. Halifax to Montreal special had discharged its human freight at 7 p.m., there was scarcely standing room in the rather small depot for rather big Montreal. No one seemed to disperse because everyone appeared to have the business to attend to of checking in or checking out. The congestion resembled an ant hill on a warm summer day.

#### **Excess Baggage.**

In the midst of the crush stood Mrs. Rhodes with baby Rhodes in her arm and wee girlie Rhodes holding her by the hand. There was a small wardrobe of personal effects at her feet and she had to stand firm on her few inches of parking space or she would have been swept away by the human surge bag and baggage. It was pitiful, but Mrs. Rhodes had assurance. She had been a fellow passenger on the White Star liner Laurentic from Glasgow.

With the assistance of my travelling companion, I had just escorted the Rhodeses et al up the long station platform from

the train that wasn't longer than the passenger, but which seemed miles loaded with the Rhodes responsibility and other excess baggage. We each had a bundle or more besides our own grips. I had baby Rhodes in one arm, Rhodes bundles in the other, and with the disengaged hand wheeled a wean's baby buggy loaded with the residue. Mrs. Rhodes had the balance besides foresight. When she left Glasgow she knew providence would provide the necessary Cumming & Co. relief at Montreal. Trainmen must have taken one of us for Mr. Rhodes, but who ever saw a husband do that much for a wife?

### **Family Courtesy.**

At any rate, Mrs. Rhodes thanked us for the gallantry as a matter of courtesy. It should be remembered however, in fairness to the lady and the Scottish in general, that we had been table mates for seven days crossing the Atlantic, and that, perhaps, had bred the usual contempt that Pope spoke about. By the time we had reached Montreal the novelty of our acquaintance had worn off and a courtesy was more or less taken for granted—a sort of private family variety.

For a time it was uncertain just what was going to happen next, and whether the tide was going to ebb or flow. Suddenly, however, Mrs. Rhodes discovered that the proper thing to do was to check her wardrobe until the departure of her train. Parking the baby in my arm again and leaving the wee lassie wi' my chum, she picked up as much of the excess as she could carry and left me to follow with the baby and the

balance. That ordeal ended the arrival at Montreal, but there still remained the get-away. We had no other alternative than to finish what we had started, so we "hung around."

### **Enter Mr. John Doe.**

At this critical moment when the emergency was over, along came Mr. John Doe to the rescue. Doe had been a fellow passenger who on arrival at Montreal, had seen to John Doe first. Finding himself safe, he suddenly remembered Mrs. Rhodes, etc. Picking her out of the crowd he rushed to her assistance, wanted to help her to arrive, to check the baggage, to steer her and the weans through the crowd, here and there, etc. Mrs. Rhodes accepted the deferred payments perhaps with the feminine vanity that is open at all times to all and sundry masculine attentions.

Mrs. Rhodes took on the new pilot for the balance of the way home and in due course was navigated safely to the outgoing train to continue another journey five hundred miles or so further into the north-west of Canada.

Just before pulling out at 11 p.m. for Toronto, we saw Mr. Doe again in the full flush of his responsibility and accomplishment talking with friends:

"Well, that's Mrs. Rhodes off safe," we heard him say.

"Who's next?" we finished.

## V.

### PARLEZ-VOUS FRANCAIS?

When you travel on a Canadian railway passenger through the province of Quebec, it is just as well to have a French-Canadian interpreter with you to pronounce the names of stations; otherwise you won't know what the signs are talking about.

Well, I had just such a one from Montreal to Mont Joli on a recent visit to Scotland. He was a very likeable chance acquaintance who spoke French fluently and English tolerably. He told me that we Scottish and English linguists didn't pronounce Montreal correctly—the "t" should be silent like other mute letters in the French language. He left the train at Mont Joli; but, had he been with me a few miles further on, I would have been a complete French scholar, so determined he was to fill my head with unpronounceable words. Although "j" is usually silent in Spanish, he confided in me, it is accentuated in French just what you would notice.

This young French-Canadian tutor of mine was born at one of the furthest outposts of the St. Lawrence river in a settlement so small the printers couldn't find a dot small enough to put it on the map. He told me its name, but it was so small I have forgotten it. Anyway he left there with his parents when very young and had been in Montreal since that

time. Now he was on his way back to visit an uncle and recuperate his health for a year or two. For two months he had been treated in a Montreal hospital for some sort of toxic poisoning, brought on, he thought, by too long devotion to the art of painting barns, homes and other such buildings—not on canvas. The doctor had ordered him to the country, and he was going there to milk cows, make hay, get up at five in the morning and to do other such recreative farm work. And I hope he recovers his health, which is the only way I can repay him for all the French he gave me, which I have already forgotten.

### **Another Ship that Passed.**

"I believe he hated to leave us," a lady sympathised with him when the young chap got off at Mont Joli. "I rather liked him."

The lady was a fellow passenger whom we two had sort of chummed up with from Montreal, and I agreed with her.

Shortly after that it was our turn to part company, and perhaps she "hated" to leave me too. At any rate it was a little party broken up for all time no matter how many regrets it left behind. One of the good things about travelling on trains is the meeting with people who might make good life-long friends if the wheels of fate did not force us off in divers directions. It has its regrets that are sometimes difficult to live down.

The lady was accompanied by her little daughter and she was on her way to a family re-union at Gaspé, where her parents were to celebrate their golden wedding on July 22nd. What a number of human stories one can pick up on a train if one has eyes to see and ears to hear! She had been living for a number of years in Arizona, U.S., where her husband was engaged in the typewriter sales agency and repair business. She got off at Matépédia, and Gaspé is the furthest east point of the province of Quebec south of the St. Lawrence river. You will find it on the map if you look for it, and it is reached by Canadian National Railways from Matépédia on the main line. Although born and brought up in the province of Quebec, this lady passenger friend was of Anglo-Saxon descent.

## VI.

### **BIG CARGO.**

The C.P.S. Montcalm sailed into Halifax harbour on the early morning of November 30th, 1936, and docked at the pier there completing a fair Atlantic crossing after having been fog-bound for two days at Gourock on the Firth of Clyde. It was the steamship company's first call at Halifax for the winter schedule, the further north St. Lawrence River route having been abandoned for the season.

The Montcalm didn't have a full complement of passengers, because tourists to the old country had already returned and the Atlantic ocean, "under the weather" for a few weeks in the past, had discouraged those who might have visited Canada. But she had about 600 tons of mixed cargo, 60,000 bags or pounds, I am not sure which, of mail—anyway it was some mail—and 150 canaries for distribution throughout Canada and the United States. The canaries were importations from a certain famous canary district in Germany, I was told, and had the reputation of being the most gorgeous singing canaries in the world. But then all Germans are good musicians.

### **The Nationality of Onions.**

Part of the cargo was a consignment of onions which everybody seemed to know was on board although no one had seen them. They were said to be of Spanish origin, but I argued with the senior assistant purser, who, by the way, was a table mate of mine during the passage, that they couldn't be Spanish onions under the chaotic conditions in that unfortunate country at the present time. But he argued back that they were Spanish onions because he could smell them all over the deck. Reluctantly I bowed under this authority, but told him my sense of smell wasn't keen enough to detect the nationality of onions.

But no sooner had daylight broken over Halifax than the Montcalm was invaded by an army of stevedores who attacked the cargo like besiegers after a castle has capitulated. Power winches and lifts were soon engaged hoisting huge

cases, iron bars, boxes of mixed cargo, bags of onions, and things, and by five o'clock in the afternoon a great part of the cargo was transferred to the spacious Halifax warehouse and the Montcalm was ready to sail for St. John, N.B., with the balance.

But not so the mail bags. Those were all unloaded at Halifax for delivery by the faster transport of train or plane to all parts of Canada and the United States. Mail is treated in the same manner when it reaches Glasgow, but there it is the fast trains of the L.M.S. and the L.N.E.R. that convey mail in a few hours to London, Liverpool, Edinburgh and other important centres in the British Isles.

### **The Halifax Docks.**

A few years ago the Halifax docks and sheds were burned down, but better and bigger ones have since taken their places. The present accommodation has a capacity for three such vessels as the Montcalm, because I saw three there, and the Montcalm is around 500 feet long.

Armies of stevedores haunt the sheds at all times waiting for ships to load and unload, and longshoremen not employed are warned by signs posted here and there to keep behind the ropes, so that there is no interference with the work going on and no delay between the ebb and flow of tides.

A few days later the Montcalm docked at Halifax on her way back to Glasgow, Belfast and Liverpool from St. John,

New Brunswick, and I went down to greet her and welcome the great Canadian liner back to Nova Scotia. There were signs posted in conspicuous places warning the general public, which, on this occasion included myself, that there was no admittance in the freight sheds except on business. But I was on business this time because I wanted to see the Montcalm again and meet some of the crew. The personality I wished particularly to re-meet was the senior assistant purser to have it out with him about those onions. Disappointment awaited me, however, for he never appeared, and the opportunity was lost to finish the argument. I might have scaled the ramparts, but did not have the front to attempt passing the sentry stationed at the far end of the gangway.

However, on a Halifax street I met two of the orchestra boys, and they remembered me as the one and only among the passengers who followed them all over the Montcalm to enjoy their splendid musical programmes. They were doing Halifax and getting a little breath of Nova Scotia's fine air before facing the Atlantic, stormy or otherwise, on their way back to England.

### **Goods for Goods.**

When I arrived at the pier that day, Montcalm was busy reloading all the great cargo she had unloaded a few days before. At least, that was a first impression. There were the same great cases, big boxes, etc., the same stevedores, the same machinery, the same hustle and bustle. At any rate, if it wasn't the same cargo, it was cargo going back to pay for the

consignment the Montcalm had brought from the British Isles. It was new cargo, and it may have been six hundred tons. There were cases of lard, boxes of hams and bacon, sacks of meat, crates of someone's leather goods, and bags of alfalfa meal. It was surplus Canadian products that were much needed in the Old Land.

When the Montcalm left the pier that afternoon with an accommodating tide, there was an emotion in my chest that I had lost one of my good friends; and it wasn't the fellow either who didn't get ashore. This fellow, I understand, was caught in the act of eloping from his wife in Scotland and had been detained at Halifax by her order. He suffered the humiliation of deportation after having been "so jolly well met" with his fellow passengers. So, boys, don't ever try to escape from your wife even by putting an ocean between you, because some of them don't like it and won't stand for it. Then think of the welcome when you return deported by her order.

## VII.

### THE LAND OF EVANGELINE.

Running across the province of Nova Scotia from the Atlantic to Minas Basin, and then in a south-west direction down the Annapolis Valley, there is a line of railway known as the Dominion Atlantic.

Dominion Atlantic history is very interesting. It appears that some years after the Nova Scotia section of the old Inter-Colonial Railway from Amherst to Halifax was built and in operation, the Dominion Atlantic Railway Company was organized, largely, I understand, with British capital. The D.A.R. ran from Yarmouth at the extreme western end of Nova Scotia, through Digby, the Annapolis Valley to Windsor and Halifax, and after a while it was extended to Truro, connecting with the Inter-Colonial at that point.

Later still, the entire system, including the steamboat service across the Bay of Fundy, from Digby to St. John, New Brunswick, was taken over by the C.P.R. From the Halifax terminal one day in July, 1936, I was a passenger, going down to Digby to connect with the boat for St. John on the way to Fredericton, N.B., to visit with friends.

The weather was beautiful, typical of Nova Scotia with bright sunshine and remarkable visibility, and the journey down the Annapolis Valley was one of the outstanding events in all my railway travel experience in more ways than one. I missed nothing I had hoped to see, and it had poetic, historic, traditional and scenic attractions all rolled up into one.

The C.P.R. takes one through that portion of Nova Scotia made famous in Canadian history because of its connection with the exiling of an Acadian community by the British in 1715. Acadia had just recently been ceded to Britain by France, and the inhabitants were given the choice of swearing allegiance to Good Queen Anne or leaving the country by force. The great American poet, Henry Wadsworth

Longfellow, has perpetuated this blot on British or Acadian history in his immortal poem "Evangeline."

### **Canadian Plot, American Poet.**

I often regret it fell to the genius of an American poet to write "Evangeline." The theme of the story is exclusively Canadian, and the reason may be that all our local poets were too conscientious to take the job on, and it was left to a foreigner in the emergency. It may be said that no one but Longfellow could have put "Evangeline" into fiction; and, had it not been for that great poet of the U.S., the Acadian story "on the shores of the Basin of Minas," would never have been known outside the realms of unromantic history, and our literature would have been that much poorer. But it pleases our Canadian vanity to know that Longfellow had to gather in Canada material for one of the greatest epic poems ever written in the English language.

The opening lines of Evangeline give promise of the poetic beauty that is to follow, and they have such an appeal that I am quoting them here at the risk of giving the poet some of that free publicity his genius does not require:

"This is the forest primeval. The murmuring pines and  
the hemlocks  
Bearded with moss, and in garments green, indistinct in  
the twilight,  
Stand like Druids of eld." ....

But I am quoting those first lines for the other purpose of preparing the reader for what is to follow.

### **Knew His Longfellow.**

I told the little boy I met on the train, who sat across from me in the same compartment, that I was looking for Longfellow's murmuring pines and hemlocks bearded with moss, and he laughed a knowing sort of reply.

We were just approaching Grand Pre at the time, and I thought the moment was opportune.

The summer vacation was about over and the little fellow was on his way home to Annapolis Royal to resume studies that one day may make him a big man in Nova Scotia. He had been visiting with friends or relatives in Halifax, and appeared to have Longfellow at his finger-tips.

With a sort of local pride and authority he said that Longfellow had done very well never to have been in Nova Scotia, that he never gave his authority for the forest primeval and the pines and hemlocks bearded with moss, and that he must have drawn on his imagination to put colour into his opening lines.

The little fellow agreed with me that when a man writes poetry he has to say, think, and write things that are not

according to Hoyle in order to even his measurements, and make his rhymes rhyme; and that in this respect Longfellow was just like the rest of us with his poetic licence. He concurred with me also that things had changed since 1715, that beards are no longer fashionable, even with trees, and that all those things may be responsible for the inconsistencies.

And then, the little scholar thought, the march of progress and the ravages of time had left their marks for better or for worse. Instead of forests primeval we have fruit orchards, and instead of bearded trees we have telegraph poles and high-tension wire towers. To replace wild meadows we have cultivated lands; but I am told that hay-producing marshes are still flooded as desired by opening flood gates in dikes and admitting sea water "to wander at will o'er the meadows."

In the meantime the train ignored Grand Pre, which was a disappointment, because I was more interested in Evangeline's home than I was in time at the moment. As a sort of compensation we stopped at Kentville, a few miles further on, where I have friends, and where there is some Evangeline atmosphere and perhaps some social and commercial rivalry.

At least we had a glimpse of Grand Pre and its outstanding attractions on the run. The traditional home is still standing, the traditional church and well are still in use, and the statue of Evangeline herself, conceived by some sculptor from memory, hearsay, or from pictures of Evangelines in general at the time, appeals to you in vain not far from the depot.

If you were born in the Annapolis Valley, or have lived there for any length of time, you become Evangeline-minded,

or something. You are conscious of Evangeline all the time in particular, and Longfellow and Grand Pre all the time in general. They are in the air, in history, in tradition; and after a while they get into your bones and you can't shake them. So, by the time we had reached Annapolis Royal, I had caught the contagion, and at the first opportunity borrowed a copy and brushed up on my Longfellow.

The little boy who had given me all the "low down" on Longfellow and all we both knew about the Acadian expulsion, left the train at Annapolis Royal, and it was with some regret that I parted with one who had such a wealth of late knowledge on a subject in which we were both so keenly interested. He was met at the station by the "gang," however, and that was some compensation. And he must have been very popular with the boys because they all wanted to carry his grip, and the battle for the grip continued until they disappeared around a corner.

### **Longfellow's Story.**

From the borrowed copy of Longfellow some weeks afterwards, I discovered that the poet's story of Evangeline was far more tragic than I had remembered from a previous reading. Perhaps the poem would have served its purpose just as well, and been more popular, had it been less tragic. Evangeline and her boy friend were taken into exile on different transports in the hustle and bustle of carrying out the deportation order, and this began a search for Gabriel on the part of Evangeline that has no comparison in fiction.

In the summer of 1715 the British passed an Act of Parliament that all Acadians who had failed to swear allegiance to Great Britain were to be exiled, and their homes, lands and cattle confiscated. This order was carried out with undue ruthlessness. In the confusion of embarking "wives were torn from husbands, and mothers, too late, saw their children left on the land." The Acadians were scattered "far asunder on separate coasts; and friendless, homeless, hopeless, they wandered from city to city."

In the meantime Evangeline "waited and wandered" in search of Gabriel. She was advised many times to drop him for other good fish that were still in the sea; but no, she continued the search over river, across prairie, along lake, through mountain pass, year after year, with an endless determination the equal of which has never been written in story. One day she actually passed him within a few hundred yards in the night, and only found him when he was old and ill in a hospital where she was nursing, having given up hope of ever seeing him again. He died in her arms, and: "Side by side, in their nameless grave, the lovers are sleeping."

There is no record that Gabriel ever set out in search of Evangeline, or else Longfellow didn't know anything about it. He simply made up his mind that he had lost her for good, and didn't care what became of him.

But no boy could walk out on a girl like that now-a-days, because the Evangelines of to-day would go to the nearest police office and have him arrested for breach of promise and alimony. I doubt if he would reach the next town let alone cross the American continent, because she would chase him

by train, car or airplane, and she wouldn't pass him on the way either. The Dominion Atlantic passes through country that is typical of Nova Scotia and remindful of many parts of Lowland Scotland. The trip from Halifax to Digby has more interest to the square mile than most other parts of Canada, with perhaps the exception of Quebec. The regret is that you will hurry past Grand Pre and not have an opportunity to check up on Longfellow. The C.P.R. should make Grand Pre a ten-minute stop station for the convenience of tourists or those interested in its history and traditions.

[The end of *Sailing On To Iceland, and Across Canada* by Robert Dalziel Cumming]