

STEPHAN G.STEPHANSSON: AN IDEALIST OR A MATERIALIST

by

Carol Mowat

A thesis  
presented to the University of Manitoba  
in fulfillment of the  
thesis requirement for the degree of  
Master of Arts  
in  
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*AN IDEALIST OR A MATERIALIST*

*BY*

*CAROL MOWAT*

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of  
the University of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
of the degree of

*MASTER OF ARTS*

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## ABSTRACT

The thesis, Stephan G. Stephansson: An Idealist or a Materialist, discusses whether the poet, Stephansson, was an idealist or a materialist by analyzing his life experience and a selection of his poems. The poems selected are: "1874," "Við verkalok," "Útlegðin," "Norður sléttuna," "Kveld," "Sól-laukur," "Ræfladans," "Assverus," "Hleiðra," "Ögranir," "Vopnahlé," "Morgunskin," "Helga erfi," "Þegar ég var ritstjóri," "Reconstruction" and "Ekkjan í Windsor." The preface defines idealism and materialism as two opposing philosophical views, the adoption of either being of prime importance to the evaluation of an author's work. The first chapter presents an outline of Stephansson's life. The second chapter delineates those basic economic, political, historical and cultural features of Iceland, the United States and Canada, which may have influenced and developed the poet's ideas either in the direction of materialism or of idealism, during his residence in each one. The third chapter is devoted to an analysis of a selection of Stephansson's poems and other writings to demonstrate the process and development of the poet's philosophical perspective and the result of his quest for knowledge. The concluding section demonstrates that Stephansson was primarily a materialist, although he had not divested himself of the vestiges of idealist views.

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## PREFACE

This dissertation evolved from a question I have posed about the content of Stephan G. Stephansson's poetry and of his fundamental perspective. The question is whether his perspective is materialist or idealist or whether his poetry reflects either view or both views. Previous scholars have discussed Stephansson's views, concentrating on one or another political or ideological aspect, whereas I will attempt to assess the fundamental basis of his views, with the assistance of dialectical materialism, the most modern form of materialist philosophy. For example, some scholars have written on his views on religion or atheism (Finnbogi Guðmundsson [1982:22-23,68-70] and Guðmundur Friðjónsson [1912:54-55]), his attitude towards war (Finnbogi Guðmundsson [1982:24-26]), his nationalism (Jóhannes P. Pálsson [1927:668-671]), his socialism (Richard Beck [1950:208]) and Einar Olgeirsson [1928:242-260]. Sverrir Kristjánsson [1953:121-132] wrote on the materialism and humanism of Stephansson, while Óskar Ó. Halldórsson [1961:58-72] wrote on his rationalism with reference to the influence of Felix Adler. Sigurður Nordal [1959:85-108, 111-129] wrote a comprehensive study which included an overview of Stephansson's political and ideological views. Contradictions appear in Stephansson's views and perhaps this

is the reason why scholars have limited themselves to addressing only some aspects of his outlook. Rather than starting with the obvious in Stephansson's perspective, such as his humanism or nationalism, I propose a method of aligning and assessing his views according to standard philosophical approaches which are derived from two opposing viewpoints, idealism and materialism and by comparing them. Each of these, as a world view, is diametrically opposed to the other, but this is not to say that the two are opposite sides of the same coin; they are not to be viewed dualistically, as two parts of the same thing, conveniently juxtaposed, but as entirely antagonistic views. They are as mutually exclusive as are the criteria they are based upon. The one does not presuppose the other.

The materialist view of the world insists upon the existence of the world as the primary starting point if one is going to understand it, and argues that reality can be understood (cf. Marx and Engels V. III 1969:133-134). The modern formulation of this ancient philosophical premise is that it "explains man's 'knowing' by 'being,' instead of, as heretofore, his 'being' by his 'knowing'." [1] While the materialist view begins with the world external to the self as perceived by the senses, the idealist view is the opposite in that it begins with the internal element or self and declares that no object would exist without its being first conceived in the mind (cf. Marx and Engels 1969 V.III

1969:360-367). The reason why these two views are diametrically opposed lies in their method of application to the real world. The idealist view projects, among other ideas, that the "thing in itself" is merely a reflection of the true "thing in the mind" or "Idea" (Hegel)(cf. Marx and Engels V. III 1969 :130, 340-342, 363). Therefore, it can be seen that not only are these two philosophical positions opposed in logic, but that each relies on a different type of justification. For example, while examination and synthesis of natural processes suffice to prove the materialist thesis, idealism must rely on a more esoteric approach, but one which did contribute to the exploration of knowledge and to philosophy.

The conclusions of idealist philosophers such as Kant and Hegel are referred to here in regard to the question of Reason and the Absolute and of the origin of ideas (cf. Copleston 1963:1-7, 27-31). The idealist premises provided the argument by which metaphysical views were sustained despite the period of intense scientific advance during the nineteenth century. Theologians equated the Absolute with God, and found such a view entirely compatible with their philosophical views. Scientific progress challenged the theologians, whose replies would not acknowledge the advance of science, but attempted to subordinate scientific discoveries, especially in the area of social science, to discussion of the existence of God. Theologians, generally idealists,

have been most concerned with proving that there is an Absolute, a unity of being which governs all. They determined that such a unity of being is an ultimate implication of thought. The Absolute meant experience transcended, and for Hegel, it was equated with pure Thought, which could "be considered in itself, apart from its externalization or self-manifestation" (cf. Copleston 1963:189). Some idealist philosophers, including Hegel, equated the Absolute with God, the highest form of religious experience, and thus a principal trend of idealism was said to have culminated in mysticism (cf. Copleston 1963:189-191). Other idealists proposed ideas such as the existence of innate ideas, as did Leibnitz (cf. Thilly 1914:394-396) and the Will as Power as did Nietzsche (cf. Copleston 1963:407-408). Several types of idealism existed in the United States, such as the absolute idealism of Royce, the personal idealism of Howison, and the objective idealism of Creighton. Dewey is one of the American pragmatist philosophers who held views about God which were similar to those of the idealists (Copleston 1966:289-293, 379). The American bourgeoisie required a philosophical outlook which could fulfill its needs, especially those which required reconciliation of individualism with economic and political subjection, and therefore American philosophy centered on idealist and pragmatist views. All these types of idealism are characterized by their opposition to materialism and by their adherence to consciousness, not matter, as being the true reality. Evi-

dently, any justification of the idealist world view must involve an abstract element to explain its relationship to the Absolute or to the Idea or to Reason itself, thus precluding analysis of the real world as a basis of examination. Although idealist philosophy contributed greatly to knowledge, the element of the abstract, used as its starting point for argumentation, became a factor limiting its advance, beyond which materialist philosophy undertook to explain the interaction of phenomena from the opposite standpoint, by beginning with real phenomena followed by theorization.

Materialism cannot deny logic; it is based on matter in motion and thus must derive its cohesion from an examination thereof. It requires truthful analysis and promotes the examination of all phenomena related to any issue under study in order to derive the truth. Materialism is the scientific approach to understanding the world and the laws which govern it. When such an approach is undertaken, it becomes clear that a poet who was concerned with social and political issues, should be submitted to criticism on the basis of dialectical materialism.

Because Stephan G. Stephansson endeavoured to examine life and uphold truth as he understood it, I believe that one can take a measure of his work by applying the materialist perspective to it. In effect, this method is intended to illuminate Stephansson's poetry by employing a principle

he maintained as correct, that of the search for truth. Had the poet lived long enough to evaluate his own work, I expect his assessment would have been based on whether he thought he had spoken the truth. To know the substance of truth one must examine life as it is, not as a concoction imposed on reality by an attitude which would consign life to a mere abstraction. This is not a task exclusive to philosophers and poets, yet they, among others, record their experience and bequeath it to humanity. Their work is generally considered great if it attempts to explain universal themes, not the least of which has been the question of truth.

Abstract thought itself cannot be devalued because it is the process of human acknowledgement of the world, but when the ability to think becomes the end in itself and no longer the process by which mankind understands and changes the world, it becomes divested of its most important role in human development according to the materialist view (cf. Marx and Engels V.II 1969 :87, 419; Lenin 1972:106-115). As definite laws govern the natural world, so they do for every part of it, including human society and life itself. It is more plausible to recognize this fact than to continue to beat to windward and bypass it.

Although idealism has contributed to philosophical thought, it has also been a limiting factor. In its more classic form, that of Hegel's philosophy, it has provided a

basis for modern thought, which has been consistently challenged by scientific theorizing. Idealist abstraction in religion led to religious obscurantism, which idolizes a mythical existence to the detriment of the actual one, even though humanity has long since passed this stage of development, having replaced myth with science insofar as understanding the world is concerned. A conception of religious obscurantism is necessary to the discussion of Stephansson's views because it illustrates the origin of his interest in philosophy. His experience with the Lutheran church, the Unitarian church, Páll Þorláksson and Jón Bjarnason demanded his analysis[2]. His interest in philosophical ideas began as an attempt to solve the problems posed by a political controversy which had disguised itself as one of a religious nature.

Religious obscurantism, which is a type of idealist mysticism as shown by Lenin in his work, Materialism and Empirio-Criticism 1972:78-79), will be discussed in relation to Stephansson's views. The poet has been determined a humanist and therefore his thoughts about humanity will be assessed. Stephansson is known to have been an anti-imperialist and this assessment of him will be reviewed in the light of his philosophical position. The intent is to establish a sound understanding of his philosophy and how he sought to apply it to his experience and how it was to serve him in his search for truth, which is understood to be objective truth

in the classical sense, meaning the study of truth, and in the common usage, meaning a person's set of organized and consistent views.

First, an account of his life will be presented, then an evaluation of the major literary and general influences on Stephansson will be added, and finally, a selection of his poems will be analyzed. The poems analyzed herein have been selected on the basis of several criteria: whether a poem illustrates a particular time of change in his outlook in which one idea became substituted for another rejected one, or whether the poem succinctly captured an indisputable aspect of his perspective, or finally, whether the poem has become renowned more than others. The poems selected are: "1874", "Við verkalok", "Útlegðin", "Norður sléttuna", "Kveld", "Sól-laukur", "Ræfladans", "Assverus", "Hleiðra", "Ögranir", "Vopnahlé", "Morgunskin", "Helga erfi", "Þegar ég var ritstjóri", "Reconstruction", and "Ekkjan í Windsor".

## Chapter I

### A BIOGRAPHICAL ACCOUNT OF STEPHAN G. STEPHANSSON

Stephan G. Stephansson, (Stefán Guðmundur Stefánsson), a poet both prolific and uncompromising, renowned in his native land and relatively unknown in his adopted one, was born on October 3, 1853, at Kirkjuhóll, a farm in Skagafjörður, Iceland. Stephansson's parents, Guðmundur Stefánsson and Guðbjörg Hannesdóttir, were crofters and rented a farm at a high price from the church at Víðimýri. Around 1860 the family moved to another farm, Syðri-Mælifellsá in Lýtingsstaðahreppur. After two years, they moved again, to rent a farm close to Kirkjuhóll, called Víðimýrarsel. When Stephansson reached the age of fifteen he moved to Mjóadalur in Bárðadalur to work for Jón Jónsson who was married to his aunt, Sigurbjörg Stefánsdóttir. Stephansson's parents worked as farmhands on the next farm, Mýri, with Helga, Guðmundur's half-sister, and her husband Kristján (cf. Pétursson and Sæmundsson 1976:66-68; McCracken 1982:1-5).

In 1873 the Stefánsson family decided to emigrate. Difficult weather between 1865 and 1874 reduced the pastureland considerably, as did the fall of volcanic ash over most of north-western Iceland, including Skagafjörður, in 1875. As a result, farming was rendered more difficult and this pre-

cipitated emigration to North America. Because his farm had deteriorated, Jón Jónsson decided to emigrate as well. The Stefánsson and Jónsson families travelled to Dane County, Wisconsin. In 1875, group of Icelandic settlers, including the two families, moved to Shawano County and began to work the land. Stephansson worked as a farmhand on other more established farms and as a lumberjack in winters. The two families pooled their resources to buy implements and livestock but their farming operation was still marginal. While they were working to establish their family farms, Stephansson and Helga Jónsdóttir, daughter of Jón Jónsson, were married in 1876 and lived with his parents.

In 1878 the Stefánsson and Jónsson families moved to the recently established Icelandic settlement in North Dakota due to the poor quality of the farmland in Shawano, Wisconsin, and the fact that "their dream of an Icelandic community, was in peril" because of "other settlers moving in"(McCracken 1982:26). In the new settlement the immigrants began another battle against unrelenting nature. They had barely erected log houses when they were introduced to a new hazard, the prairie blizzard. The first spring brought a flood which subsequently drained, leaving thick Red River mud, which was impossible to work in, covering the alluvial plains. A boom in 1881 in Dakota forced prices of goods up, and since the Icelandic farms had low yields as yet, many of the settlers had to find supplementary work. Stephansson went to work on the railway gangs.

Stephansson had a crop failure in 1888 and that, combined with the controversy over the freethinking philosophy of the cultural society, "Hið íslenska menningarfélag", of which he had been one of the founders, encouraged him in his decision to begin a new homestead in Alberta. In 1889 the Stephansson family moved to the Medicine River area in Alberta (Markerville), Canada. Breaking land for the third time in his life, it took nine years for Stephansson to establish his farm. Grain growing was unsuccessful due to temperamental weather patterns, so the farmers turned to live-stock raising. Stephansson began to submit his poetry for publication during this time. Wrestling with the land and poetry thus became his dual occupation.

As was customary in the Icelandic settlements, schools were built while the people were still struggling with clearing the land. In Markerville two schools were built in 1891, with Stephansson's donation of some of his land for one of them, called Hólar. In 1897 the "Tindastóll Butter and Cheese Manufacturing Association" was formed as a joint-stock company and Stephansson was one of the 34 Icelandic farmers who joined it. The creamery proved of great assistance to the farmers. During those years Stephansson's workdays were consumed with the needs of the farm, but troubled by his inclination to write poetry, while his nights blossomed with poems which were harvested images of the land, illustrations of his thoughts.

Stephansson was invited to go on a speaking tour of the Icelandic settlements from November 1908 to February 1909, as a result of which more people took an interest in his poetry. Another invitation was extended for him to visit the Icelanders on the West Coast in 1913. He was invited to speak in Wynyard, Saskatchewan in 1920 and 1926 (cf. McCracken 1982:101, 128, 130). Some of the people who listened to him on his tours became life-long correspondents with Stephansson, for example, Jón Jónsson frá Sleðbrjót, a self-educated farmer who moved from Iceland to Vogar in the Manitoban interlake district. Jón Jónsson and Stephansson exchanged views on the political developments in Iceland, Canada and the United States, as well as international events. Both supported socialism although Stephansson seemed to have had an incomplete understanding of its premises, as shown by his view with regards to the function of classes. Stephansson thought that the proletarian class should include farmers and settlers because they laboured long hours at manual labour just as workers did, thereby misunderstanding the economic and political reasons for distinguishing between classes. The letters exchanged between them were often assessments of the relative positions of various individuals in the Icelandic communities, their political interest and their effect on the communities. With those correspondents who were authors themselves, Stephansson discussed works of literature as well as religion, philosophy and politics.

In 1917 while war raged in Europe, Stephansson was invited to Iceland as a respected guest (McCracken 1982:114). The invitation came at the height of the conscription controversy in which he was the most vociferous advocate of refusal of participation. Stephansson was himself eligible for conscription if it were to become compulsory, since all those under 65 years old were eligible and he was 64 years of age at the time. Stephansson was treated as the Icelandic people's poet while in Iceland and travelled throughout the land, reading his poems and composing new ones. The poems written during his journey were published under the title "Heimleiðis" ("Homeward Bound") and dedicated to the Icelandic youth associations. The poems registered the people's joyful response to his visit.

While Stephansson was in Iceland, the Great October Revolution took place in Russia. Stephansson had supported the Russians in their revolution of 1905, which ended in failure, by writing a poem, "Pétursborg," to honour them. His outlook became increasingly consistent with communist theory during the war years, and his poetry reflected the change insofar as to include an image of the workers in discussion and poised for action as in "Reconstruction," which was written in 1919.

Stephansson wrote without yielding to any pressure exerted by his critics. He strove to present truth in its starkness and integrity. Whoever did not recognize that had only

himself to blame for not doing so. People's recognition of his poetry increased as he became more intransigent in his social criticism. At the same time there was vehement opposition to his views among Icelandic-Canadians. This battle was carried on intensively in the Icelandic newspapers in Winnipeg, especially during the last ten years of his life, which were devoted to reading and writing; his outpouring of poems during that time was extensive. Finally he was able to achieve what he worked so steadfastly for during his life, the opportunity to dedicate all his time as well as thought to literature.

Stephan G. Stephansson died in August 1927 and was buried in the Kristjánsson burying ground with others of his family.

Stephansson published his first poem, "Kveðja," in Norðanfari on August 9/1873, a few days before he emigrated. Beginning in 1890, Stephansson's poems appeared regularly in the Icelandic newspapers and periodicals in Winnipeg as well as Iceland. His publications are: Úti á Víðavangi (Winnipeg, 1894); Á ferð og flugi: Kvæða-bálgur, ed. Jón Ólafsson (Reykjavík, 1900); Andvökur I-III (Reykjavík, 1909-1910); Andvökur IV-V (Winnipeg, 1923-1938); Andvökur VI (Reykjavík, 1938); Andvökur I-IV, ed. Þorkell Jóhannesson (Reykjavík, 1953-1958); Kolbeinslag (Winnipeg, 1914); Heimleiðis, eds. Águst H. Bjarnason og Guðmundur Finnbogason (Reykjavík, 1917); Úrvalskvæði, ed. Unna Benediktsdóttir Bjarklind

(Reykjavík, 1917); Jökulqöngur (Wynyard, 1921); Vígslóði, ed. Ársæll Árnason (Reykjavík, 1922); Bréf og ritgerðir 1-1V, ed. Þorkell Johannesson (Reykjavík, 1938-1948); Andvökur, Úrval, ed. Sigurður Nordal (Reykjavík, 1939), later printed as Stephan G. Stephansson: Úrvalsljóð, ed. Unna Benediktsdóttir Bjarklind (Reykjavík, 1945); Gullregn úr ljóðum Stephans G. Stephanssonar, ed. Jóhannes úr Kötlum (Reykjavík, 1967).

## Chapter II

### STEPHANSSON' PERSPECTIVE ARISES FROM A MATERIALIST BASE

#### 2.1 LIFE EXPERIENCE PERVADES POETRY

According to materialist views, poetry must express ideas generated from the experience of the author who is conscious of and participates in the life surrounding him. Life itself becomes well-ordered and unified when viewed through its positive element of progression, although it seems predominantly chaotic when examined through a singular and individualistic perception. As the poet immerses himself in thought derived from experience, analysis supplants observation, but is continuously rejuvenated by new observations. The need to analyze is elemental to human thought and proceeds from practical as well as philosophical exigency. The poet achieves synthesis in thought over a lifetime, just as people generally do, but differs from them in that his grappling with the understanding of life is captured in print and ceases to be altered. This fact alone urges his most serious consideration of the elements of his knowledge and art. A socially-conscious poet must portray humanity's search for knowledge and will to progress with an accuracy and resiliency that will astonish, provoke thought and perhaps promote action.

Nothing can be created in a vacuum and nothing can exist without its being related to something else. A poet is influenced by his environment and therefore it is necessary to relate Stephansson's life to the conditions of life in the countries in which he lived. His formative years having been spent in Iceland, it would be likely that his ideology would have been formed through traditional views learned there. His adult years having been spent first in the United States and later in Canada, it would be likely that his philosophy would have been influenced by the new conditions developing there. Each of the three countries represented a distinctive experience for the poet, as he witnessed capitalism developing, the bourgeois class consolidating its power and the proletariat contesting its hegemony.

Insofar as Stephansson was concerned, experience was not to be ignored, but understood and acted upon. Stephansson observed the genesis of a split within the Icelandic communities along religious lines and its political ramifications. His interest in idealist ideas (rationalism in particular) was altered during the course of the dispute, and the tendency toward materialism emerged in stronger form. The split in the communities, which generated such interest in Stephansson, originated with two religious disputations between Reverend Jón Bjarnason and Reverend Páll Þorláksson, of which the first occurred in 1878 and the second in 1879 (Kristjánsson 1965:92-97). The two ministers disputed each

other's religious views and attitude toward the state Church of Iceland (Lutheran). Each attempted to establish a congregational following in New Iceland in 1878. Bjarnason was thought to be more liberal than Þorláksson, who had close connections with the Norwegian conservatives in the Missouri Lutheran Synod (Kristjánsson 1965:105-106, 112-116). The Icelandic people, especially those in New Iceland and the settlements in Pembina and Dakota, were divided on this issue. Þorláksson died in 1882 and the Icelandic Lutheran Synod was founded in 1885 under the leadership of Bjarnason (Kristjánsson 1965:217). Stephansson attended the first annual conference of the synod in Winnipeg in 1885, charged by the Icelandic women of Mountain and Park districts in Pembina with the task of defending the right of women to participate in church affairs. His position would have been too progressive for the Synod had he been able to present it, but Bjarnason found it expedient to insist that Stephansson accept the position of assistant secretary for the Synod. In 1888, Bjarnason attacked the Icelandic cultural society, "Hið íslenska menningarfélag", to which Stephansson belonged and Stephansson engaged him in polemics in the Icelandic newspapers of Winnipeg.

In order to understand the principles which governed his actions, and the philosophy and political theory which sustained them, it is necessary to investigate their historical sources. Stephansson cannot be evaluated as an idealist or

materialist with neither a reference to specific historical events nor to his actions. Therefore several ideas and historical events will be noted. These will describe Iceland from circa 1840, when views of national independence and sovereignty were gaining currency, and early political movements in the United States and Canada from 1877 to 1921. Stephansson's views, where applicable and relative to these features, will be referred to here. This chapter will provide a basis for an analysis and a definition of some of the fundamental views which governed Stephansson's work.

## 2.2 THE POLITICAL AND CULTURAL FEATURES OF ICELAND IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

### 2.2.1 The Political Conditions of Iceland

The Iceland where Stephan G. Stephansson spent his youth was governed by a foreign power which had not become one of the power brokers of Europe. Denmark had assumed political control of Iceland primarily to provide a new market for its merchandise during its struggle with the Hansa merchants of Germany[3]. Danish enterprise had been beneficial to Iceland in that it had developed trade, but this was achieved at the expense of the people who became more impoverished while a portion of the wealth they produced increasingly enriched the Danish merchants (cf. Björnson 1983:186-189, 200-206).

Stephansson grew up being intensely loyal to a country, which was impoverished and burdened by social injustice, and whose release from the fetters of the past he hoped to see. One of these fetters held his own family as well as many others, and could not be broken without their leaving it behind; this was feudalism, an economic system whose grip on the people made life tenuous (cf. Björnson 1983:93-94, 103, 122-123, 179, 216-225). The economic and political factor, which weighed so heavily against the Icelandic people, was the domination of this system over all social relations. Primarily, the feudal overlord was the clergy which controlled the land and education and promoted such idealist ideology as would serve to guarantee its privileged position in society. These conditions of existence were common to most countries in Europe, although there were differences in its structure, especially in the ownership of the land, which were primarily dependant upon historical factors. The opposition of the people to feudalism was widespread, but expressed differently throughout Europe and over a considerable amount of time. The Age of Enlightenment hastened the demise of feudalism and the French revolution confirmed it in one country, France. Other nations did not carry out as decisive a struggle as France did, but were affected by the results of the French revolution.

Despite the feudal economic and social relations existent in their country, the Icelandic people were responsive to

ideological change. In 1848 Jon Sigurdsson became a leader in the struggle for Iceland's independence and wrote many articles for various Danish and Icelandic newspapers such as "Þjóðólfur", "Ný Félagsrit", "Norðri" and "Norðanfari" and "Kjöbenhavnsposten" with the intention of arousing nationalist sentiment (Guðmundsson 1956:11; Kristjánsson 1961:59-73)[4]. His arguments for Iceland's independence were backed up by references to the country's history. According to him, Iceland was an independent country between the years of 874 and 1262 and "Íslendingar hafa aldrei hyllt Dani né neina aðra þjóð til einveldis yfir sig" (Guðmundsson and Karlsson 1985:2-7)[5]. The nationalists disseminated their views amongst the people, but did not organize them even to defend their own position in parliament.

Icelandic society was divided into classes. In 1850 the population consisted of "landbúnaður 82%, sjávarútvegur, verslunarmenn og gistihúsarekstur 8%, iðnaðarmenn, daglaunamenn og sveitarómagar 5% og embætismenn, prestar og menntamenn 5%"(cf. Guðmundsson and Karlsson 1985:1:46)[6]. Stephansson belonged to the largest class, the peasantry, to which the idea of independence was of extreme importance, because it was the only way to guarantee a mode of production based on profit-making and therefore increased wealth. The peasants, whether they owned some land or not, were impoverished, and therefore their nationalism had an economic source. One can readily surmise that discussion of the

ideas of independence, improvement to the economy and the consequent progress of the people would have taken place in Stephansson's home during his youth. The extent and tenor of some of his most ardently held views suggest their source is to be found in his youthful experience. For example, his belief in the progress of humanity as dependent upon economic and political independence can be directly related to the Iceland of the latter half of the nineteenth century. During that time, as the Icelandic people became aware of the condition of their country and their citizenry, they initiated discussions and attempted to influence the political direction of their country.

For its part, the merchant class consisted largely of Danish merchants who were opposed to any notion of independence among the Icelanders since it threatened their monopoly on trade. The Icelandic intellectuals who were the nationalists (reformists), were against the Danish monopoly but intended to capture it in the interest of a future Icelandic bourgeoisie. Jón Sigurðsson stated that in order to "koma upp þess konar meðalstétt á Íslandi sem er í öðrum löndum, þá er auðsætt að bændastéttin hjá oss verður að ganga í meðalstéttarinnar stað"(Guðmundsson and Karlsson 1985:2:59)[7]. By the twentieth century a basis for the bourgeois class would become possible in Iceland, but Stephansson would experience directly the dominance of this class later in life in the United States and Canada.

2.2.2 A Newspaper, "Norðanfari", Records Views Current in Nineteenth Century Iceland

The peasantry had its own purpose in mind regarding independence, while the intellectuals and the merchants each had theirs. All views were present in the Icelandic newspapers of the time, as can be deduced by a review of one of them, a newspaper published in Akureyri, entitled "Norðanfari". Since "Norðanfari" was published in Akureyri, which is the nearest town to Mýri, where Stephansson had access to Jón Jónsson's library on the farm where he worked, it is likely that he made use of it. The library provided Stephansson with his first varied selection of reading material. The newspaper was a fairly new one when Stephansson moved to Mýri, but its most significant contribution to political journalism, its coverage of the French Revolution of 1871, was undertaken while the young poet still lived there.

Jón Jónsson, for whom Stephansson worked for five years, may not have had "Norðanfari" in his library, but that does not preclude the possibility that such ideas as were expressed in the newspaper were discussed in the literary society to which Jónsson belonged. In fact, Stephansson refers to a newspaper, "Norðri", published in Akureyri before "Norðanfari" in a letter to Rögnvaldur Pétursson, dated January 23, 1919 in Bréf og ritgerðir II. He mentions the poetry he read "...á prentsmiðju-öld Akureyrar, þegar hún hofst nýja-brumlegust með 'Norðra' og 'Fróðlegu'

ljóðsafni" (Stephansson Bréf og ritgerðir II:184)[8]. "Norðanfari", published between 1862 and 1888, succeeded "Norðri" after one year. "'Norðri' hætti göngu sinni um áramótin síðustu (1861)..." (Guðmundsson 1956:24)[9]. "Norðanfari" became widely read as can be assumed from the fact that articles were submitted to it from various districts in Iceland.

"Norðanfari" presents an exceptional opportunity to gauge the popular views of Iceland, of Akureyri, and of its environs, more particularly, in order to assess influences on Stephansson as a youth. For example, the strong support of national liberation struggles found in "Norðanfari" constitutes a theme so fundamental to Stephansson's philosophy, that it presupposes a specific origin. The structure and content of "Norðanfari" provide a clue to the origin of this theme by illustrating one aspect of Stephansson's environment as a youth: the political orientation of the people as being both nationalist and internationalist. Regular columns in "Norðanfari" were devoted to national news, "Innlendar frjettir", and international news, "Frá útlöndum". Articles reported on the struggle of people against the colonial powers and for their national independence, as for example, the Irish people's struggle against British imperialism and the Italian revolutionary Garibaldi's campaign against Napoleon III's expeditionary army. A series of articles on French politics during 1870 and the Paris Com-

mune of 1871 was sent to the newspaper by one of its reporters who resided in London and visited France. Norwegian emigrants to the United States wrote articles for "Norsk Folkeblad" ("The Norwegian People's Newspaper") which were copied and published in Akureyri's newspaper and which expounded on the "ryk af einhverju því sem þið [their correspondents] hafið aldrei sjeð nje heyrnt...þar er stjórnarbyltingin (Revolution)" in the United States, (Norðanfari 46-47, Nov.24, 1871:94)[10]. The readership of "Norðanfari" was comprised mainly of peasants and fishermen, whose interest in their country's condition was recognized by the editor. "Norðanfari" must have been an effective means of communication within the peasant class whose members were spread out across the land. The clergy was cognizant of the newspaper's potentially effective political role, because some of its representatives felt obliged to attempt an obfuscation of the events of the day within its pages while recommending that the people should submit to the overlordship of a foreign power, its puppet government in Iceland, and even to the liberals (nationalists). in order to preserve the status-quo. Their position was based on the premise that all economic and political activity was subordinate to God's will, and therefore, the best way for Icelanders to help themselves was to accept their fate passively (cf. Norðanfari 1873:I-II:3; III-IV:7). It must be remembered that one of the principal landowners in the country, the Church, could only maintain its economic and polit-

ical position if the people remained passive and did not raise demands of their own in these spheres.

The newspaper from the northern Icelandic town of Akureyri was generally progressive, a reflection of the people's will exerting itself over the feudal conditions of the times. Excerpts from "Norðanfari" are a good indication of the general climate of thought (ideology) in Iceland over 100 years ago. Such views expressed in print would have meant little to an illiterate people, but the Icelandic peasants were literate and therefore capable of acquiring knowledge in a self-reliant way. The effort of the people to gain knowledge overshadowed the ongoing political debate in the "Alþing".

"Norðanfari" was an outlet for the expression of the people's views in a country under foreign domination where that expression must still retain anonymity, as the cryptic signatures of the articles in it demonstrate. The Icelandic people, although not able to vote, took part in politics more directly by attending meetings and circulating petitions. Even changes in the law in 1857 gave only 8-10% of the population the right to vote (cf. Guðmundsson and Karlsson 1985:2:57). District meetings were established after "Þjóðfundurinn" in 1851[11]. These meetings were well attended, largely by people with no right to vote. Thus, it can be concluded that the people were not content to be excluded from the political process, but utilized the meth-

ods of influence available to them: the press, petitions and participation in discussion at meetings. "Alþing var sett hinn 1. júlí(1862)...aldrei munu hafa legið fyrir alþingi fleiri og almennari bænarskrár um stjórnarbótarmálið en nú" (Guðmundsson 1956:5)[12]. Such a people, who cultivated independence of thought and action, must have felt shame at the thought of their country's political and economic dependence. "Norðanfari" published many letters in its pages which remain a testament to the people's views. The people's views had a definite historical source in the ideas of the Age of Enlightenment, which, besides causing a flourishing of literature, also produced a distinct change in social life; the traditional "húslestrar" became "lestrarfélög."

This changed tradition could be said to be the result of the revolutionary thought of the Age of Enlightenment of the eighteenth century and subsequently of the call for national liberation of the nineteenth century. Within this tradition was preserved the enduring, poetic impression of the noble-mindedness of his people which was later reflected in the poet's views. Stephansson was so impressed by the role of the literary societies within the community in Iceland that later in life he attempted to maintain his new community's integrity by establishing a cultural society, based on what he took to be the most advanced theory available, Felix Adler's ethics (see p.30-31, 36-37, and 72). The factors which lead to this development at first seem to be obscure,

but as new ideas gained momentum and affected social life, including Stephansson's environment, they became more consequential.

### 2.2.3 The Age of Enlightenment and the People's Response

The waves of philosophic and political change generated in continental Europe thundered to the shores of Iceland in the nineteenth century. The ideas of the Age of Enlightenment, the progressive stage of development of the rising bourgeoisie of the eighteenth century which arose with the stimulation of science into new discoveries and the examination of social relations on a scientific rather than a religious basis, generated massive social change. Throughout Europe the bourgeoisie challenged the old order and fought to attain political ascendancy. The newly-formed working class began to advance its own political interest.

New ideas in science and art, conveying a more democratic and humanist outlook, were relayed to Iceland by Icelandic scholars who had gone to Denmark to study and had become involved in the political discussion of the times. The students concluded that the Danish yoke had to be curtailed, that the social and intellectual life in Iceland had been allowed to become stagnant, and therefore, the first step to be taken was to stimulate nationalist sentiment and encourage the people themselves. The most progressive poets and scholars took up their pens against foreign domination and

for self-determination. These students raised their voices against oppression in 1835 with the publishing of "Fjölnir," a literary periodical promoting Iceland's independence.

The ideas of independent thought and self-determination were important developments in philosophy. They provided the ideological basis for the struggle of the bourgeois class for power in Europe, expressed in the idea of national independence. But in Iceland initially, independence was the goal of a few scholars and poets, among whom Bjarni Thorarensen and Jónas Hallgrímsson became prominent. Both were poets whose imagery, composition and mythic quality in conveying the relationship between humanity and nature represented the romantic style. The Icelandic romantic poets utilized their art in the interest of national independence, using images of Iceland's natural setting, personified by human attributes. The romantic style was the main trend in the literature of the latter half of the nineteenth century; it prepared the ground for the development of realism and provided the sentimental and emotional basis for the concept of nation and national independence.

The Icelandic people were not entirely unprepared to take up the idea of independence. "Fjölnir" had been preceded by "Skírnir," published from 1827 continuously until the present and therefore the oldest periodical in Scandinavia, and another pamphlet, "Ármann á Alþingi" published in 1832, which promoted independence in more subtle terms. The awak-

ening of the people had been under way since the eighteenth century. In response to the ideas of the Enlightenment, some Icelandic scholars took an interest in science. Annals were written and a book of Icelandic geography was written by Magnús Stephensen, who founded 'The National Education Society' in 1794. More importantly, however, the people effected a transformation of a major part of their social life, and consequently their ideology began to change.

Stephansson grew up at the height of this period of interest in acquiring knowledge, which became intensified in Iceland by the mid-nineteenth century, and therefore his youthful ardour was equally intensified with the principles of progress and democracy of the Age of Enlightenment. Such principles had existed among the people, but at that time the anticipation of the national liberation struggle added to their vigour. Stephansson does not refer to this influence in his "Ævisögu", but the support of national liberation struggles appears in his poetry as a fundamental element of his philosophy. It is probable that it was such an early-acquired and all-pervasive perspective that it seemed to him to have always been a part of his ideology. Stephansson not only read the works of the Icelandic authors mentioned here, he was also affected by their ideology directly through his social environment.

#### 2.2.4 'Húslestrar' and 'Lestrarfélög'

Although books were available to the peasants in Iceland, formal education was not. By tradition most children were taught at home. The tradition of reading at home attested to the people's resilience because the work on the farms was labour intensive and took most of their time, morning to night, all their lives. The farm work produced people's basic needs, and though they were impoverished, the people were self-reliant in cultural matters. "Húslestrar" were treated as being necessary, and one person was assigned the task of reading while everyone else worked over the wool in the evenings. The Icelandic peasant farmers were a literate people who were determined to acquire knowledge. When newspapers began publishing in Iceland there was a need for such reading material and a capacity to utilize it. The literary periodicals "Skírnir" and "Fjölnir" were followed by a newspaper, "Ný félagsrit." ("Jón Sigurðsson...byrjaði að láta til sín heyra um stjórnmal með 'Nýjum félagsritum' 1841" [Guðmundsson and Karlsson 1985:2:14])[13]. All of these periodicals promoted the progressive ideas of freedom and national independence.

The initial attempts by the nationalist scholars to awaken nationalist sentiment in the Icelandic people were effective, because they addressed the actual aspirations of the people. The call given by the nationalists to form reading societies on the farms met with great enthusiasm because it

meant access to new ideas. Such societies were formed in the 1840's and 1850's and libraries were set up for their members' use; the people's response indicates their desire for knowledge. A report in "Norðanfari" demonstrates the importance of knowledge to the people. The following unsigned report entitled "Lítill hugvekja um lestrarfjelög" ("A Little Treatise About Reading Societies") was written by a guest of one of the reading societies:

Fjelagið hafði staðið í 10 eða 11 ár...Fyrir það fje [unspecified] keyptu þeir bókmenntafjellagsbækurnar, Norðanfara, Þjóðólf, Ný fjellagsrit og lítið eitt af öðrum íslenskum bókum. Íslendingur hafði og verið keyptur fyrsta árið. Engar bækurnar voru bundnar, því árstekjunum var jafnan varið til bókakaupa; sumar bækurnar voru í mjög löku ástandi, rifnar og skitnar, einkum Skírnir og 12. deild Árbókanna. Þjóðsögurnar voru orðnar svo svartar af saur, að þær máttu heita ólæsilegar með berum augum ... þau [félögin] fækka kaupendum og kaupenda fæðin hamlar aptur útgáfu þarflegra bóka og stelur kjarki úr vísindamönnum, sem færir eru um að rita er þeir sjá, að þeir muni eigi fá ómak sitt goldið" (Norðanfari 25-26 Oct.16,1866:49)[14].

Stephansson was brought up within the tradition of "húsllestrar" and "lestrarfélög" which fostered his initial interest in philosophy, science, literature, and politics. The staunch democratic attitude and the opposition to colonialism and imperialist war, for which he later became renowned, was first learned in the crucible of Icelandic tradition at a time when the people were ready to put it to use to bring about new conditions in Iceland. Stephansson's family's duty was to impart its knowledge to him to carry on the people's aspirations into an unknown future.

Guðbjörg Hannesdóttir, Stephansson's mother, taught him to read, write and compose verses in the style of Sveinbjörn Hallgrímsson who was a popular poet at the time. His family aroused Stephansson's undying interest in knowledge and adherence to what was conceived to be the truth. His parents supplied Stephansson with a basic education he could not have had one otherwise, because the family could not afford to pay one of the itinerant teachers who travelled between farms.

Both his father and grandfather were intelligent and articulate men. Understandably, Stephansson's habit of hard work and intensive reading was learned from both his parents. He read voraciously. Although the family had few books at home, he was able to borrow some from neighbours and had access to others from the reading society his father belonged to in Víðimýrarsel. Stephansson "sullaðist því um ógrynninn öll af ýmsum skruddum, mörgum skrifuðum, t.d. sögur, rímur, árbækur, þætti' Hjálmars og Gísla, Lærdómslistafélagsritin, Klausturpóstinn, 'Landsuppfræðing' Magnúsar Stephens., auk flests, sem nýtt kom út, eftir að ég kom í Víðimýrarsel" (Stephansson Bréf IV:84)[15]. When he went to Mýri at the age of fifteen to work for Jón Jónsson, he had read extensively. Since Jónsson was a bookbinder by trade, he had a large collection of books, including the sagas. Jón Jónsson belonged to a reading society as well, and Stephansson availed himself of this new resource.

It was at Jónsson's farm that he received the only formal education he was to have in his life, one month's studying of English with an itinerant teacher in February, 1873.

The variety of books to which Stephansson had access in his youth would have allowed him to explore many elements of literature. That he examined both style and content and their interdependence can be discerned by his recollections in Bréf og ritgerðir. His remarks about Jón Vídalín's Postilla, for example, indicate his interest in the intensity of words, the effectiveness of language. Jón Vídalín's book was one of those books read during the customary "húslest-rar" at Stephansson's home. About Vídalín's religious treatise he wrote: "Ég man enn, að mergur málsins hjá karli, og fróðleikur hans um Rómverja, var mér unaður. Guðfræði hans lá mér víst í léttu rúmi, hvorki efaði hana né aðhylltist að öðru en því, hvé brýnt var talað" (Stephansson Bréf IV:88[16]) His objective, yet impassioned view of this religious work, assessing it only on its intrinsic value both spiritually and stylistically, was typical of Stephansson's critical inclinations. His mastery of the Icelandic language, poetic diction and didactic style became recognized features of his exceptional poetic insight. His views were consistent in this case; his accepting attitude towards people's beliefs was based on the same values as the criteria by which he evaluated literature: truth and democracy. Such criteria are not necessarily those of a scholar and

Stephansson did not claim to be one. Yet, he did not hesitate to present his "humble" opinions on literature to scholars. Guidelines of his own delimited his tolerance of others' views. For example, he tolerated neither immoral nor undemocratic views; he made a practice of opposing them wherever they appeared, although he attempted to criticize only the ideas rather than the individuals who held them. These guidelines were not always reconciled with each other by Stephansson, and when this resulted in his being misunderstood, he became disheartened, believing that his motives should be apparent to anyone.

"Lestrarfélög" were rapidly organized throughout the country; libraries were established under auspices of these societies. They were more precisely an extension of the traditional "húslestrar". Stephansson refers to the "lestrarfélög" his father and uncle belonged to in "Drög til ævisögu" ("Autobiographical Fragments"). New elements in the list 1700:1 "reading societies" can be discerned, such as: (1) improved general knowledge, (2) exchange of ideas in an organized form, (3) self-improvement and community betterment, (4) cultural self-reliance of the people, (5) interest in political ideas made possible. Powerful influences on individuals originate in their social surroundings and their ideas are not necessarily reduced through their being held in common; the reading societies provided a progressive influence on the people. Nationalist sentiment was generated by discussion and the acquiring of knowledge.

While Iceland's nationalist poets, who initiated the new tradition, concentrated their advocacy of nationalism on Iceland from the vantage point of Copenhagen, Stephansson's poems later ascribed this ideal to all nations from his relatively isolated outpost. His nation never ceased to be Iceland, although he placed all his capabilities in the service of his community and the advancement of progressive ideas within the United States and Canada. He continued to participate in discussions of ideology in Iceland by publishing his poetry in literary journals such as "Skírnir" after he had become recognized as a poet.

2.3 POLITICS AND CULTURE IN THE UNITED STATES IN THE FINAL DECADES OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY AND CANADA IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY

2.3.1 The Response of the Farmers to Monopolization in the United States and Canada

In the United States Stephansson lived in poverty and worked hard as before, but the value of the product of this labour depended on an unstable market. Monopolies were consolidated just prior to and during the depression of 1873 (Yellen 1956:3-7). Capital was amassed rapidly through speculation and rate wars, but thousands of people were reduced to abject poverty. For example, wages were arbitrarily reduced by half on some railway lines where the resultant strikes were ended by the state's use of force. The railway capitalists, subsidized by the government, charged high (monopoly) prices and unloaded their securities on townspeople whenever their ventures were unsuccessful (Foner 1977:13-22). Rampant speculation resulted in depression in 1873. Farmers were burdened by increasing debt and low prices; their hopes of economic self-reliance were shattered by the monopolies' economic manipulations.

Another boom gave way to another depression in 1883, ten years after the previous one. The effect on the farmers was severe. Many Icelanders in the Dakota settlement could not maintain their debt payments and lost their farms; they were recent immigrants holding onto their land and the results of all their economizing could be swept away by speculators.

Stephansson was one of the strongest supporters of "The Farmer's Alliance" which was organized in 1884 to start a cooperative to market wheat, but was unable to thwart the dominance of monopolies on the market. "The Farmers Alliance" attempted political action which resulted in control of the Assembly in 1889 and the presentation of a list of farmers' grievances. Nothing was accomplished, and the next election was lost. "Although the Dakota Farmers' Alliance was supported strongly by the Icelanders, it had neither the influence nor the experience to combat successfully government inaction and financial interests" (McCracken 1982:54). Facing the implacable enemies of drought, depression and political impasse, some of them, including the Stephansson family, concluded that it would be better to start again elsewhere.

In Canada it was not until several decades later that the economy began to exhibit features of monopolization by a financial oligarchy. British imperial hegemony was firmly established in Canada and only the American monopolies would eventually threaten and overpower it. Farmers in several provinces including Alberta organized into cooperatives to raise their demands. The United Farmers of Alberta (U.F.A.), organized in 1906, developed an eclectic philosophy; it supported the "Bolsheviks" in the abstract, yet substituted the farmers for the workers as the leading force in the revolution and suggested unity on this basis[17]. The

U.F.A. wished to share power with the workers and Stephans-son supported its position. The party won the provincial elections in 1921. Three years later Stephansson still supported it but with less conviction and predicted the disappearance of the farmers' movement (cf. McCracken 1982:116). The Second World War had driven grain prices up, and all the grain growers' associations, except the U.F.A., excitedly offered their political support for the Canadian government's war effort as well as their own increased profits. H. W. Wood, a leader of the United Farmers of Alberta, was staunchly opposed to conscription and to farmers profiting from war, and in 1917 he travelled to Ontario to offer the support of the U.F.A. to the protest against the war which the Quebec and Ontario farmers had initiated (cf. Wood 1975:291-292).

In the industrialized countries of Europe the bourgeoisie was consolidating its power in a manner similar to that in the United States. The literature of both the industrialized European nations and the United States propounded a philosophy sympathetic to either the bourgeoisie or the proletariat, although some authors insisted on an assumed political neutrality, difficult to maintain during a period of intense political development.

### 2.3.2 The Conflict Within North American and European Ideology

In the realm of ideas, the conflict between the materialist and idealist views increased as the nineteenth century unfolded; Charles Darwin exemplified the former in the field of natural science, while Herbert Spencer introduced the latter into social science. The theory of evolution presented by Darwin in his Origin of the Species, published in 1859, tore through the perceptions of individuals like a laser beam and challenged institutions whose functions were determined by philosophic presumptions suddenly found to be baseless. Debate on the theory of evolution was not limited to scholars, but spread throughout English society and to other countries, becoming a general topic of discussion.

Although Stephansson's comments in "Drög til Ævisögu" regarding Darwin and Spencer are made in passing, they appear to have been well-considered years before he wrote the passage, especially since they address the principal questions of the theories' detractors. Stephansson declares his interest in philosophy and in the theories of Darwin and Spencer: "Helzt hefi ég slægzt til að skilja stefnur, ein-kanlega minnar tíðar...maður kemst ekki hjá að kynnast ögn kenningum Herbert Spencers og Darwins...þetta treðst í mann, þó ekki sé frá 'fyrstu hendi'..."(Stephansson Bréf IV:88)[18].

While Darwin's theory explained the development of the lower orders of animals, it did not directly deal with human society; nonetheless, it established "evolution" as a basic element of scientific knowledge. Herbert Spencer used Darwin's theory by dissolving it into one single phrase "the survival of the fittest" and remoulded it into his "Synthetic Philosophy" by categorizing aspects of societal function and their public display, thus reducing human behaviour to that of lower order animals. Wherever Spencer's work demanded of him a definite motivation for change and development in his hypothesis, he proclaimed "the force," that is: "something unknowable" or the "Ideal" or "God" as the missing element with which a complete understanding could be attained. Stephansson comments: "...ég hefi aldrei fallizt alveg á, hvernig Spencer kemst að orði um 'orku' ['Force'] eða 'ið óskynjanlega' ['The unknowable'], og skil ekki, að kenning Darwins um framþróun haggist í aðalstefnunni, þó t.d. stökkbreyting ('Mutation') kunni að vera til" (Stephansson Bréf IV:88) [19].

Stephansson became acquainted with the views of the agnostics, the deists and the individualists, all of whom belonged to the idealist philosophical trend. The agnostic and deist views are compromises between atheism and religion, while individualism became one aspect of the ideology of the United States.

One of the most influential moralists in America in the mid-nineteenth century was Felix Adler, who was also considered a freethinker. He affixed the concept of bourgeois liberalism to religion, concluding that religion must be liberated from ecclesiastical authority. He believed that the individual was alienated from society, but with the development of his talents he would find a meaningful place and therefore his personal worth in society. "From an ethical point of view, perhaps the most important aspect of Adler's epistemological thought is his stress on the idea that the human mind is an active agent"(Guttchen 1944:252). Stephansson's agreement with Adler's views was based on the latter's highly moral position and the fact that he put his ideas into practice. Stephansson admired such characteristics in anyone. Knowledge, for the poet, was not to be sought for its own sake, but to be put to use in a highly principled and moral way. The mind, as an active agent in the poet's view, took up problems for solution by applying both experience and theory. Stephansson criticized the arbitrary authority within the church as did the deists, and followed their activities with interest. Stephansson had been searching for an understanding of philosophic thought by evaluating the ideas he had inherited from tradition, and by searching out others. Adler's aesthetics were systematic and based on humanist ideas. Therefore, he studied and applied them to the social problems he had begun to identify in the Icelandic communities of North America.

Another trend in American ideology was that of the rationalists or freethinkers. The American rationalist (transcendentalist) Ralph Waldo Emerson, promoted self-reliant individualism as an ethical philosophy. Another American rationalist, Henry David Thoreau, Emerson's friend, was an individualist, a Nature mystic who styled himself as a "conscientious objecter," and wrote "Civil Disobedience" in 1848. Emerson and Thoreau were two of the reformers in American thought who generally espoused the idea of perfecting the individual to bring about a truly democratic society.

Stephansson became interested in the American rationalists who determined that progress was its own reward. He turned his critical abilities to the examination of the doctrines available to him. He examined the position of the freethinkers that science was the determining factor in any argument. His interest in freethought, as well as the pursuit of truth and science, induced Stephansson to question the position of the Lutheran church in society. Since the church was a social institution which provided a sense of community for the people, he had involved himself in its organization and in the controversy over its policies. For example, although he respected Páll Þorláksson, the conservative Lutheran minister, he disagreed with his orthodox attitude. He was opposed to two by-laws of the church organization at Garðar, one of which was the

"...atkvæðisleysi kvenna áskipað í 'andlegum' málum og söf-  
nuðum"(Stephansson Bréf IV:86)[20]. As secretary of the  
Garðar Lutheran church he refused to sign the minutes con-  
taining such policies. The majority of the Garðar congrega-  
tion withdrew from the church and set their own policies as  
a congregation which denied the infallibility of the relig-  
ious scriptures. In 1885 Stephansson and his friend, Jónas  
Hall, were sent as delegates to the founding convention of  
the Icelandic Synod in Winnipeg. They intended to advocate  
the inclusion of women but no such discussion was brought to  
the floor, except that an agreement was reached whereby the  
word "man" was to include "woman" wherever it appeared in  
the synod documents (cf. McCracken 1982:39-42).

Stephansson assailed the bastion of feudal repression,  
the church, with his support of women's rights. His experi-  
ence led him to oppose the religious idea of passivity of  
humanity before its deity and dependence on a hierarchical  
system which endorsed master/slave relations and the denial  
to women of their inalienable rights. Stephansson clearly  
held principles he had been taught in Iceland, although he  
was not satisfied with these alone. He was inspired to  
search for ideas which would make the changes in the life  
around him understandable and assist him to take action in  
that regard.

### 2.3.3 Progressive Ideas in European and American Literature

In "Drög til Evisögu" Stephansson refers to the many authors he read. His extended readings included works of Homer and the famous English, French, German and Russian authors, all of which he read in English translation. The list includes Emerson, Longfellow, Poe, Kipling, T. H. Huxley, R. L. Stevenson, Thoreau, Zola, Balzac, Jack London, Mark Twain, and Dickens as well as others. The progressive authors among these had a significant influence on Stephansson. Dickens for example was a realist who wrote from experience of the degradation of bourgeois ideals into rapacious laissez-faire policy, and depicted the elements of bourgeois society to illustrate this fact. Similarly, Stephansson dramatizes his denunciation of monopoly and war, the tendencies of the bourgeois class of his time, in wrenching characterizations as the discussion in chapter III will demonstrate.

Stephansson had a particular interest in two French realist authors, Balzac and Zola. Honoré de Balzac, the first French realist in literature, created a new narrative style, intensely descriptive and analytical. French realism emphasized man's subjection to material laws and tended to represent morbid states of mind and repressive aspects of social experience according to Ioan Williams in his work, The Realist Novel in England: A Study in Development (p. xiii). The

modern novel and its concern with symbolism, mythology and psychology has descended from Balzac's work, among others (Barb ris 1973:24-25, 30-34). Balzac was a materialist who examined elements of society through his writing; he described the struggle of the bourgeoisie for power up to the July Revolution in France in 1830, the bourgeoisie in power in the 1840's, the effects of the industrial revolution and of the reorganization of the economy. He created "des personnages qui sont le lieu des contradictions d'une  poque". (Barb ris 1973:269)[21]. Stephansson's characterization of individuals' reactions to war are reminiscent of Balzac.

 mile Zola, a realist, based his analysis on conflicting ideals, yet he viewed the role of the author as a social element. Zola's view with regard to Balzac was: "Au bout, il [l'auteur] y a la connaissance de l'homme, la connaissance scientifique, dans son action individuelle et sociale" (Barb ris 1973:245)[22]. Although he was detached from the proletarian struggle and did not consider himself a socialist, Zola demonstrated a profound sympathy for both workers and peasants in his novels. Whether he considered himself a socialist or not, he was referred to as such. Donald David Stone in his work, Novelists in a Changing World, states: "By far the most discussed and feared novelist of the eighties (1880's) was Zola, and Zolaism came to stand for various threats of materialism, barbarism, and socialism" (p. 28).

The work of Balzac and Zola reflected the social effect of both revolutionary and reactionary political events on the people's culture. The political life of France was volatile and the circumstances of the people's life bore witness to that. Stephansson's work reflected the social conflict of a people whose culture was beginning to confront new conditions which favoured more conservative views and a weakening sense of social obligation, which otherwise would have been bound to conflict with individualism. In 1880, a sudden boom in real estate speculation in Winnipeg offered opportunities, from which some Icelandic supporters of the conservative Prime Minister of Canada, John A. MacDonald, profited, and the first Icelandic entrepreneurs emerged (cf. Kristjánsson 1965: 159-160, 165-169, 288-296).

The American authors, Mark Twain and Jack London, were the authors whose socially-conscious works captivated their readers' attention. Mark Twain was a realist author and a social critic who achieved great respect and popularity. His social outlook was consistently materialist. "Twain criticized the government for its alliance with the industrial robber-barons, the railway speculators in the 1870's in the United States" (Foner 1958:34). "Indignant over the widespread corruption in government, Twain sought by use of his satirical powers to communicate his feeling to the people and arouse them to action" (Foner 1958:67). Twain's view was based on historical materialist ideas; "the common

men will produce a new social order and the only effective means to its achievement is violent revolution"(Foner:1958:109). Jack London was a realistic novelist who was active in the socialist movement in the United States. Both Mark Twain and Jack London supported the early Russian revolutionaries.

Stephansson intended to arouse people to defend their ideals and accomplishments through the challenge he presented in his poetry. One of the contributions to Stephansson's work made by the above-mentioned progressive authors was that of supplying him with an understanding of international social, economic and political conditions under capitalism, which were at variance with the conditions of an isolated farmer on the Canadian prairie. The adherence of such authors as Balzac and Twain to the issues central to the times served as an example of social content which for Stephansson was the crucial element of his work.

#### 2.3.4 'Lestrarfélagið' and 'Menningarfélagið'

The Icelandic immigrants in Pembina continued their tradition of reading and composing poetry. Poetry was thought to be a fine and powerful medium of expression; it stored the folklore of the people. A library was established and by 1888 it contained 100 books, mostly new publications from Iceland. The literary society, "Lestrarfélagið Gangleri," was established where stimulating discussions were held and

various authors' ideas analyzed. "A part of the Icelanders' literary heritage, debating societies were vehicles for social interaction, for self-improvement and development of the individual's intellect..."(McCracken 1982:32).

Stephansson's interest in seeking insight in keeping with scientific knowledge is illustrated by another undertaking he initiated in the community of Garðar. In order to develop their ideas more freely and less in connection with the churchmen, he and six other members of "Gangleri" formed a second cultural society, "Hið íslenska menningarfélag", in 1888. The society followed the ideas of the moralist, Felix Adler; it was an open forum although not headed by a minister as Adler's Society of Ethical Culture had been. The new society flourished; both members and invited guests were expected to make presentations and examine ideas on a logical basis. The focus of the society amounted to an attempt to encourage the people in the face of extreme privation and hard work and to free them from a feudal subservience to mysticism in favour of progressive ideas. But although the society was established under lofty ideals, it did not escape criticism from Jón Bjarnason, president of the Lutheran Synod, who attacked the society in the Lutheran paper, "Sameiningin." Stephansson's reply in "Lögberg" aptly refuted Bjarnason's attack.

Stephansson had applied the concept of the traditional "lestrarfélag" with its insistence on the advancement of

knowledge for the sake of society, as well as Adler's concept of an "ethical" society based on the individual's advancement, as being primary to the organization of "Hið íslenska menningarfélag." Stephansson's formula for the society contained an internal contradiction between isolation from and inclusion with the rest of Canadian society, and between maintenance of traditional and acceptance of new ideas, which he may not have analyzed and solved. Although there is an indication that there was another cultural society formed later in Markerville, there is little evidence to suggest that it was as bold as "Hið íslenska menningarfélag." "Hið íslenska menningarfélagið" was a cultural society which purported to uphold Icelandic cultural tradition, but there were no other similar cultural societies in the other Icelandic communities in North America, and this was one of the factors which weakened it. It was organized to maintain tradition, while taking up new ideas, and yet preserve an isolationist attitude despite existent social sentiment. The cultural society could not fulfill the mandates it set for itself, and because it was attacked while it was relatively new, it collapsed of its own accord.

Bjarnason's attack had confirmed Stephansson in his adherence to logic and his rejection of religion as a guide to thought. Being excluded from the church, as he had been since 1885, was not of great concern to him, but being isolated from the community was unacceptable. This had been

the first public attack on Stephansson made by conservative elements of the Icelandic community. Years later, after he had become a contributor of poems to several of the Icelandic papers, including "Heimskringla," "Lögberg," "Voröld" and well respected as a poet, the conservatives found it necessary to renew their attack. They could not approve of the social views Stephansson promoted in his work, and his denunciation of the imperialist world war, Canada's participation in it and the Icelanders' enlistment, discredited him in their view.

#### 2.3.5 The Anti-Imperialist Poet in Canada

Stephansson's library was twice reduced by the loss of books damaged in transit between homesteads. In Markerville he built up his library once more to include American books on diverse topics including "Marxist literature on Christianity and communism" (McCracken 1982:104). He collected books and pamphlets published in Iceland on Icelandic grammar, poetry and short stories; he subscribed to many Icelandic and American periodicals and Icelandic newspapers from Iceland and Winnipeg. "True to his Icelandic heritage, Stephansson had pursued his love of reading and his quest for knowledge; he strongly believed that the only darkness in life was that of ignorance" (McCracken 1982:104). Literature offered the world, the life of countries like England, France and Russia to the poet.

After settling in Markerville, Alberta, Canada, Stephansson worked to improve the community as before, ensuring that it had a school, cultural society and library. Having accomplished this, he concentrated more on writing poetry; his farmwork and his political and cultural discussions expressed by letter with his friends. His outlook on politics and philosophy underwent a further change; he became more supportive of the idea of a revolution, yet a contradiction in his activities became discernible. While writing scathing criticisms of the capitalist system in verse, he supported the farmers' movement which turned out to be more capitalistic than socialistic.

His belief in community participation and support of anyone who seemed progressive led him to join the "United Farmers of Alberta". Stephansson was vehemently opposed to war on principle and would have welcomed H. W. Wood's progressive stand against war. Conscription was a serious threat which became a reality in 1917 with the "Union government's abrogation of exemptions to the ... classes of military conscripts" (Wood 1975:292).

In a letter to Jón Jónsson frá Sleðbrjót, written on 2, June 1920, Stephansson states: "Ég er í bændadeild hér og af einlægni- en vel að merkja, formaður okkar, Woods [Wood misspelled], heldur fram hugsjón...sem ég felli mig við... réttlátri stétta-flokkun, útilokun utanstétta, iðnaðar-stétta alþing, í stað auðflokka-þings...þetta er nú

aðalkjarninn í soviet-stjórn" (Stephansson Bréf II:221)[23]. Stephansson seems to have assessed the United Farmers of Alberta with the practical business sense of a "struggling farmer". The organization he considered to have "Bolshevik" tendencies turned out to be the principal means of securing credit agencies, markets and reliable transport well within the capitalist system. In his book, The Farmers' Movement of Canada, L. A. Wood demonstrates that The goal of the U.F.A. was to establish the basis for farming as a business with as much of its risk as possible circumvented through manipulations by the government. The U.F.A. was the first farmers' organization in Canada to secure a cooperative grain growers' market under state ownership. But state ownership of an enterprise by a capitalist state cannot be considered a "Bolshevik" idea, rather its opposite.

The significance of the political demands of the working class was first elucidated by Karl Marx in historical materialist terms, but Stephansson did not study his theories. Therefore, although he expressed agreement with key points of Marx' theory, it seemed to be on an abstract and subjective basis. His reference to the United Farmers of Alberta as being "Bolshevik" is a good example. In a letter to Jónas Hall, dated 29 January, 1924, Stephansson states: "Jú, við erum að því leyti enn "Bolsévikar", að við trúum á, að allar stéttir ættu að vera fylking fyrir sig, ekki til að drottna yfir hinum, heldur til að sjá sínum hluta borgið, án

hagsmunaskerðingar annars verkalýðs..."(Stephansson Bréf III:122)[24].

Stephansson sought knowledge not for its own sake but to put it to use for the benefit and progress of humanity. His respect for people, whose strivings for peace and progress impressed him, poured into poems which were indictments of the capitalists. According to the poet, war was not glory but human wastage which would only profit the capitalists. A cycle of poems begun in 1914 by the poet on this theme which included "Vopnahlé" (Ceasefire) in 1915 was published after the war under the title "Vígslóði"[25].

Stephansson's political ideas derived in part from the social education he received in Iceland. His intensely democratic vision is a reflection of the Icelandic people's desire for democracy, a desire which cannot be suppressed by a repressive state. Such desires are not exclusive to any nation, but may be more succinctly expressed by the nation's poets. Democracy, in the people's view, has always been comprised of mutual obligations between individuals and their society. As a result, the Icelanders' view of democracy cannot easily be dislodged from their social practice; it is a view based on experience. Stephansson's passionate defence of democracy did not limit itself to an abstract venue, but rather transcended the narrow individualism which was strongly promoted as democracy by the American bourgeois class, and became a defence of revolution and "Bolshevism."

Stephansson supported the revolution of the Russian workers against the Czar in 1905 because he always stood with the oppressed against their exploiters. But in this case, a new revolutionary element had demonstrated its increasing power in Russia, and the poet observed it. The revolution was lost and retribution severe, but the imperial order was fatally threatened. The poet supported the Russian workers just as did the authors he admired, Mark Twain and Jack London.

Stephansson applauded the October Revolution of 1917. In a letter to Jón Jónsson frá Sleðbrjót in 1922, he writes: "'Sovíettið' hefir staðizt allar eldraunir enn. Þar eru vansmíðar, sem við var að búast, en hugsjón, sem 'vex að vizku og náð' og ein á lífsvon, trú mér til, fái hún frið og framtíð" (Stephansson Bréf III:68)[26]. The fact that he makes no mention of the Winnipeg General Strike of 1919, although the workers involved in it declared their support of Bolshevik demands, demonstrates the limits of his politics; he was not necessarily a socialist, although he admitted to being one. In fact, the revolutionary struggle in Russia had brought about a further definition of these terms, replacing "social-democrat" with "socialist" and "socialist" with "communist," commensurate with a development in political theory. Stephansson was not likely acquainted with the new developments; his usage of the term "socialist" suggests this. Yet, he was always ready to

evaluate ideas and events, utilizing as much knowledge of them as was available to him. He supported the Russian revolutionaries because he thought revolution was obviously the only direction the people could take. Rather than a socialist, he could be called a democrat, who was open-minded enough to salute the liberation of a nation of oppressed people in Russia and recognize the political theory which guided them to action, Marxism-Leninism. He took this political stand privately in letters to his friends.

Stephansson supported national liberation struggles on principle but experience was teaching him an additional principle, that of the necessity of proletarian revolution. This principle reaches its apogee in the anti-war cycle of poems, "Vígslóði." Yet the poet confined himself to exposing the machinations of capitalism and materialism to his community by opposing the first imperialist world war. Certainly, his opposition to bourgeois monopoly, imperialist war as well as his support of the Russian revolution, confirm that Stephansson was an anti-imperialist.

The fact that Stephansson's ideas developed from definite experiences in life is amply demonstrated by his anti-imperialist view as well as his interest in the progress of humanity and the social interdependence of individuals. The fact that his views changed as he gained new insights from his readings, applied them to his life and attempted to convince others of their validity confirms his ability to ana-

lyze and accept new ideas. The fact that he assessed the need for social change on the basis of his experience and observations of each environment he lived in, illustrates his adherence to progress and its manifestations in life. The literary tradition of his people, an indelible memory, seemed to him to be the necessary element of culture which would hold his and other Icelandic communities together and therefore must be maintained. Yet it could be changed to reflect new conditions. The democratic tradition of his people, sustained by desire, seemed to him to be a fundamental characteristic which could not be denied, but was not exclusive to them. Because Stephansson maintained his principles as well as an open mind, he was compelled to analyze his experiences honestly and adapt his views to his observations. The following chapter will illustrate Stephansson's adherence to his philosophy through an analysis of a selection of his poetry.

### Chapter III

#### THE PHILOSOPHY OF STEPHAN G. STEPHANSSON AS EXPRESSED IN HIS POETRY

##### 3.1 A MEASURE OF PHILOSOPHY

Philosophy has an application in the real world to the extent to which it expresses specific motivation and experiences of societies, classes of people and the individuals within them. A poet's world-view has an historical source, may affect current social issues, and provides a part of the cultural inheritance of his people. It is useful to evaluate the poet's contribution to society in view of his philosophy by analyzing his work and its relation to society during his lifetime. This chapter presents a discussion of sixteen poems selected from Stephan G. Stephansson's work and includes reference to some of his letters and essays, with the intention of demonstrating the thought behind his work. The discussion is based on the following sixteen poems from Andvökur: "1874" (1874), "Við verkalok" (1883), "Útlegðin" (1891), "Norður sléttuna" (1898), "Kveld" (1899), "Sól-laukur" (1908), "Ræfladans" (1911), "Assverus" (1914), "Hleiðra" (1914), "Ögranir" (1914), "Vopnahlé" (1915), "Morgunskin" (1915), "Helga erfi" (1916), "Þegar ég var ritstjóri" (circa 1916-1917), "Reconstruction" (1919) and "Ekkjan í

Windsor" (1921). The letters and essays are to be found in Bréf og ritgerðir. These poems span his productive career and are representative of his principal themes.

Specific themes of Stephansson's poetry will be analyzed according to whether they demonstrate (1) materialism or (2) idealism in his philosophy. In illustration of these two fundamental philosophic viewpoints, three applications of philosophy to social life, encompassing the contradictions existent between them, will be examined. These are: (i) the individual's attitude towards life, (ii) a view of humanity and society, and, (iii) a view of politics.

The three applications of philosophy will be presented on the following basis: (1) The first subsection under each section will illustrate the poet's view of what may constitute the motivation for life. The materialist motive is that of change, development and motion, and is therefore, material and not intellectual, while the idealist motive is that of an abstract and moral purpose to life. (2) The second issue is that of the poet's understanding of humanity and society. While materialist philosophy describes humanity as the most advanced life form which is conscious and declares progress to be its purpose, the importance of human progress, even of humanity itself, as conceived by idealist philosophy, seems to be diminished by concepts such as the "Absolute" or "Reason", especially when used in reference to God. (3) The third question raised here is one of the indi-

vidual's political role in society. The materialist view insists that action and involvement, with the intent to change society are necessary, while the idealist view is that an individual's involvement in society interferes with man's purpose, which is of an esoteric nature and pre-determined.

### 3.2 THE MATERIALIST PERSPECTIVE IN STEPHANSSON'S POETRY

#### 3.2.1 Stephansson's Attitude Towards Life

In his poetry Stephan G. Stephansson fully expressed his views without reserve or hesitation. He had confidence in his views although he did not claim to be a philosopher or even an educated man. His confidence arose from the fact that his outlook was based directly on his experience and was clarified, inasmuch as it was, through his endeavours to gain knowledge. His attitude towards life is well illustrated by his observations of nature, the interrelations of phenomena and the laws governing them. He observed the world as a changing one in which development is derived from motion and nothing is static. For example, the poet compares changes which occur in the natural environment with those of a human being.

Stephansson's poems about the elements of nature are often formulated as personifications, gracefully linking the characteristics and changes in the life of animals, plants and landscape with those of people and their social life.

From his daily experience of many decades of farming, Stephansson knew that all natural phenomena are interdependent. He recognized the element of struggle in life and, unfaltering, embraced it. This practice produced his keenly critical perspective, his relentless demands on progress to hasten its pace and his dauntless challenges to people to view life realistically.

The poet lived by struggling with his natural environment; he wrested a living from unyielding land. His view of nature was not that of a romantic observer strolling in the park, nor was it that of an embittered pessimist pursued by foul storms. Nature was the poet's lesson-book; he referred to it to clarify and to illustrate his thoughts. The poems "Sól-laukur" (Crocus"; 1908) and "Morgunskin" (Morningshine"; 1915) together present his view of nature appropriately[27]. In "Sól-laukur," the crocus' resilience makes it appropriate to announce both the birth and death of each human being. In "Morgunskin", the pummeling the land takes from several days of prairie torrential rain can be a calamity for farmers, but as it suddenly recedes, it leaves a glistening sheen behind in puddles and as a coating over everything. Then beauty dispels the poet's frustration which was due to foul weather. Stephansson had occasionally referred to prairie storms' interruption of his farmwork in letters to his friends, but "Morgunskin" demonstrates a conciliatory attitude toward the farmers' unpredictable ally,

nature. By contrast, his treatment of nature in poetry is opposite to that found in his letters to friends where it is reduced to no more than terse descriptions of the weather and how much trouble it has caused: the farmer's view rather than the poet's.

An example of the theme of the possibility of human achievement and the optimism derived from it appearing as the substance of a poem is illustrated in the poem "Sól-laukur." It describes a crocus rising out of decay on a barren hill, the earliest of all flowers in spring. It is drab and protected against the weather, but on the first day of summer it is transformed from gray into blue and touched by the sun after the storm. The flower's delicacy is contrasted with the "röggvarfeld" and augmented by the mention of human features: "En undir börmum ýrði í rautt, / sem æðablóð þar glitti blautt" (Stephansson Andv. II:106)[28]. The metaphor becomes complete, another transformation has taken place; the crocus becomes personified as a man and the image created strikes the reader by its veracity. An image is more successful if it applies to the objective in mind in delicate and interconnected ways. The "crocus-man's" delicacy and strength is claimed for "hvers vökumanns / ég vefði þig í sveig og krans" (Stephansson Andv. II:106)[29]. The theme is that of the necessity of enduring adversity to achieve culture and the idea that each person should be cultured. The poet places wreaths of crocuses by the cradle and grave of each person, celebrating life.

Because the poet's personification of a lower order of life concentrates on the changes effected in it, which in turn correspond to changes in its environment, it demonstrates the changing life of humanity. Culture develops from the collective experience of humanity and changes to fulfill different needs. The poet recognizes the necessity of change and resilience in life in the poem "Sól-laukur."

Another demonstration of Stephansson's view of the natural environment is found in "Norður sléttuna" where man's hopes are both encouraged and defeated by nature. The poem describes the thoughts of the settlers as they leave a land which has defeated them. The settlers' previous homesteads on the alluvial banks of the Red River in Pembina County had been fertile but subject to yearly floods. The personification of the Red River in "Norður sléttuna," as one condemned "að vaga um aldur með fangið sitt fullt / af flatlendis svartasta leir" conveys the futility of the farmers whose arms had been plunged into the river's muddy floodplains year after year (Stephansson, Andv. II:13)[30]. The river was "óslyngja," the land "endalaust borð," but the trail north was no better because it was strewn with ominous visions (Stephansson Andv. II:1-14)[31]. In the village personified in the poem, houses circled together for protection around the railway station, while new farmhouses on the plain stood starkly alone with a presentiment of abandonment unwilling to desert them.

The farmhouses, metaphoric "... strandsker við glælygnu-sæ" are imitated by hills, blue and distant as well as crops, aquamarine in the distance (Stephansson, Andv. II:14)[32]. The images of the farmhouses represent the futile desires of the settlers, who live surrounded by their newly ploughed earth, so far in debt that even the promise of a manageable land cannot diminish this fact. The small villages arranged along the railway exist only as way-stations and maintain a visible representation of illusions. Life's expectations are not guaranteed realization, but this fact is not manipulated by fate, "deus ex machina," but by consequences of interactions among people.

"Norður sléttuna," a poem from the cycle "Á Ferð og Fluggi" ("On a Journey and in Flight"), is constructed of select images, the first one a vivid personification of the Red River, followed by metaphors and similes which describe the land and settlement as the poem ever increases in tempo. It reaches its apogee with an apostrophe where the poet addresses the land, challenging it: "ef endistu að plægja, þú akurland fær, er uppgefst þú: nafnlausá gröf." (Stephansson, Andv. II:14)[33]. The poet then creates an image of the consequences of the failure of the land and ends with a synecdoche where "um vallgróna haugana blossana ber" indicate a neglected culture (Stephansson Andv. II:15)[34]. The tone of the poem is ironical and each image contributes to the irony, intensifying it, allowing it to peak at the

apostrophic challenge and then subside until the final dramatic conclusion. The conclusion drawn is that a people with a neglected or truncated past has no future either, implying that a change of attitude, even ideology, is necessary:

og bæina óskírða uppvaxa lét  
 ei öldin um dal eða strönd  
 á föðurleifð minni. Í myrknættið út,  
 er minningar tendra sín bál,  
 um vallgróna haugana blossomana ber,  
 svo bjart er um feðranna sál.  
 (Stephansson, Andv. I:213)[35].

The irony of the poem supports the poet's theme of struggle.

"Kveld" ("Evening"), written in 1899, begins with two personifications, one of the earth which moves itself "frá sól inn í skuggana elt" and the other of "lífsönnin" which are the poet's "daglengis vörður" (Stephansson, Andv. I:210-211)[36]. Throughout the poem metaphors are interchanged with antitheses. The antitheses succeed one another in the middle four stanzas of the poem, each one contributing another aspect of the irony of man's progressive nature and his subjected state. For example: the dreamed of land where "einskis manns velferð er volæði hins" leads to "... sigurinn aldrei er sársauki neins, ..." and later to "það atgervi, er hirðulaust dó" (Stephansson, Andv. I:211)[37]. The last lines of the last stanza resolve the antitheses and the irony into a boldly optimistic view: "það lifi, sem bezt var í sálu mín sjálfs-/ að sólskinið verður þó til!" (Stephansson, Andv. I:213)[38].

In reference to the most promising future of a people, any people, the poet eulogized the land, a land yet unnamed, in a lecture given in Markerville in 1915, entitled "Landið okkar ótilnefnda" (Stephansson, Bréf IV:206)[39]. The following quote from the article shows Stephansson's belief in the intimate connection between a people and its land.

Landsins, sem þú eða ég, eða hver okkar sem er, hefir kærast. Landsins, sem okkur tekur sárast til, af því vera okkar hefir vafizt inn í það, séum við annars nokkurs staðar heimilishæf á himni eða jörðu. Landsins, sem hvorki er 'paradís in týnda' né 'paradís in afturfundna', heldur aðeins landið, sem geymir manndóm manns: högustu handarverkin og hæstu hugsanirnir. Hver sem jarðvegur þess var, varð hann þeim gróðurreitur. Einu gildir þá, hvort það var kalt eða milt, flatt eða fjöllótt, það var okkar land. Á þess skjöld höfum við grafið einkenni okkar, á einhvern hátt og óafmáanlega (Stephansson, Bréf IV:206)[40].

Although the poet recognizes the importance of the land to a people, he is compelled to state that for the Icelandic settlers Canada is yet a foreign land. The "hálf-ókunnug þjóð" in "Útlegðin" ("The Exile") indicates both an unstable social life of people estranged from each other and the isolation of the exile's "nation" within the country of Canada (Stephansson Andv. I:102)[41]. It should be borne in mind that the Canadian government made use of the labour of the immigrants to clear the land. Although the ethnic communities in Canada survived, social problems and political exclusion haunted them. Many individuals eventually joined the rest of society, but only on its terms. The poet recognizes this problem and suggests that within the "hálf-ókun-

nug þjóð," the exile cannot expect the bonds of kinship to include or welcome him because he is unknown and without a fatherland. As a result of this difficulty the exile is unresolved as to his course of action. He recognizes that he cannot alter the course of social instability; he has no fatherland. But nature perseveres and the nation's natural attributes still exist and therefore the possibility of change does as well.

### 3.2.2 Stephansson's View of Humanity and Society

By confirming human progress as a measure of the value of a life of struggle and as its primary purpose, Stephansson rejects religious obscurantism and turns toward objectivity. The rejection of the limitations of religious obscurantism was necessary for the poet, but was not recognized by the community as essential for its prosperity. But life imposed problems which for Stephansson demanded solutions, the most compelling one being how to contribute to the advancement of humanity.

Stephansson's experience was one of financial indebtedness to the burgeoning capitalists in the United States and of brutal poverty most of his life. The monopolies' control over transportation and the grain market extended to the relations between the people themselves, whether they perceived it or not. Stephansson did perceive the change that bourgeois rule can effect. His observations on this issue

are well presented in the short story "Dómarinn" ("The Judge"), written in 1888 to illustrate the change of attitude evolving from a change of social status observable in the differences between a new immigrant and those who have been residents of the new country for years.

Ten years later the poet described the result of such abuses as being the unacceptable perversity of the typical American boom town created out of the capitalist motive for production - profit. Profit is taken even at the expense of life. The village in "Norður sléttuna" ("North Over the Plains") is representative of the particular illusions of life in the American west; the immigrant settlers could be inveigled into a line of credit and cajoled into buying merchandise. Capital concentration was directly associated with the railways during the 1870's and 1880's and thus the poem's image of a village by the rails is one of an outpost of capital and the exploiters it spawns. Villages sprang up and faded according to the fortunes of the railway moguls.

The poet and his community of exiles leave the beautiful land which harbours a blight; price fluctuations of grain had placed the simple fruit of their labour in jeopardy. However difficult the decision to leave was for the group of Icelanders, the poet among them assessed their decision to be correct, thinking that their moral strength might degenerate if they had remained there. Living in debt and being subjected to the ministrations of churches and taverns was

the gloomy prospect on which the travellers turned their backs, refusing to be enslaved by the railway moguls.

"Norður sléttuna" condemns capitalism for destroying peoples' lives and livelihood, even robbing them of their creativity and its expression in culture. It is no wonder the people who live in the villages along the rails or in the farmhouses of the empty plain are similar in thought and appearance; they are equally oppressed. "Norður sléttuna" is replete with images expressing the poet's perspective on fundamental social issues. Stephansson's purpose is to fight for the progress of mankind and for enlightenment against oppression.

The poem "Norður sléttuna" presents such observations as might have drawn the poet to the conclusions which appear in "Kveld." "Kveld" spans time and distance and portrays Stephansson's view of the entirety of human endeavour. "Kveld" is more representative of a later stage in the development of the poet's views than "Norður sléttuna." Both poems examine humanity's destiny, but while the former expresses sorrow for the people's loss of opportunity and dignity, the latter confirms the poet's belief in human progress.

The sixth stanza in "Kveld" contains an image of the plight of "labour" where "erfiðið liggur á knjám", while "iðjulaust fjársafn á féleysi elst / sem fúinn í lifandi trjám" and where it is "villt um og stjórnað af fám" (Ste-

phansson, Andv. I:211-212)[42]. The poet sees men oppressed by endless toil, robbed by the greed of the few, then declares that the "framfara skíman sé skröksaga ein" but for the fact that enlightenment reaches more people over time (Stephansson, Andv. I:212)[43]. Yet the pace of progress is lethargic and many die in its wake, their aspirations ignored. The poet states that the ideas of enlightenment which have even reached "í smalanna einveru" (metonymy: meaning shepherds' thoughts) also inspire him to raise his voice in protest and encouragement (Stephansson, Andv. I:212)[44]. Stephansson had been one of those shepherds who had sought knowledge. The poet is confident that since his objective is in keeping with the progress of humanity, that whatever good he would achieve in his lifetime would not be dismissed and forgotten.

"Kveld" conveys both the poet's optimism and his impatience: progress is certain, but it is painfully slow. The poet describes the precise state of mind of a labourer as he ends his day's work, when he can finally unfetter his thoughts which soar to ascertain the conditions of all who have spent the day engaged in furrowing the earth or hammering out tools. The poet is released from the farmer's chores.

The immigrant farmers, whose life was so tenuous, could ill afford to lose their strength of purpose as a community, but the consequences of the rule of the bourgeoisie on a

society are manifold. Karl Marx elucidates the consequences of bourgeois rule in The Communist Manifesto, published in 1848. Marx writes that: "The bourgeoisie has stripped of its halo every occupation hitherto honoured and looked up to with reverant awe. It has converted the physician, the lawyer, the priest, the poet, the man of science, into its paid wage-labourers" (Marx, Karl, and Frederick Engels 111). Marx then explains how the bourgeoisie conquers all nations through its marketing, improved production and communications. The bourgeoisie "creates a world after its own image" (Marx, Karl, and Frederick Engels 112). Several occurrances in the Icelandic communities since the settlement days bear out Marx' remarks. The fact that there are no authors from these communities who write in Icelandic, and only a few who write in English today, indicates that the cosmopolitanism of bourgeois society has had its effect, as it has in other ethnic communities in Canada and the United States. Stephansson was revered as a poet by a people whose culture had not yet suffered enfeeblement by the bourgeois order. He predicted that if the Icelandic people in North America did nothing to ensure the continuance of their culture, they would become subject to the antisocial ideology of the bourgeoisie. Therefore, Stephansson insisted that the people maintain their cultural traditions, including those of a religious nature, because they would strengthen the bonds among them and assist them to evaluate new conditions.

The thematic leitmotiv of adversity and enlightenment becomes the substance of entire poems. One such poem is "Helga erfi" ("Helgi's Funeral"), an elegy, heart-felt and expressive of the deepest human emotion. "Helga erfi" honours Helgi Stefánsson, a farmer in Wynyard, Saskatchewan, who was considered a stalwart of the community.

This portrait of courage, noble-mindedness and social-consciousness is a fine eulogy in itself, but Stephansson is not content to leave it as a statement of fact. He becomes didactic; he agitates his readers, whose social history he knows profoundly, with a bold allusion to a hero also named Helgi. Helgi Hjörvarðsson, the hero of the Eddic poem, "Helgakviða Hjorvarðssonar" ("The Lay of Helgi Hjorvarðsson"). Helgi was considered a courageous defender of the people who exchanged vows with the valkyrie, Svava. Helgi Hjörvarðsson had avenged his mother's father[45]. When Helgi had fought his last battle and lay dying, Svava was summoned to him. She flew to him, vowing revenge. Helgi asks her not to grieve but to take his brother in his stead. Svava refuses, but Héðinn, Helgi's brother, begs her to agree and vows revenge for Helgi.

In "Helga erfi" Stephansson concludes from the story of the hero, Helgi, that his sacrifice was undertaken for the sake of his people. During the heroic age, one of the tasks of a hero was to maintain and, if necessary, to defend the honour of his family. In this age the test of valour of an

honourable man is one of defending the democratic aspirations of his people. By equating Helgi Stefansson with Helgi Hjörvarðsson, Stephansson demonstrates that the history of a people is one of noble intent and progress. The love of Svava symbolizes the centuries old mutual love and responsibility of a people and its heroic defender. The poet states that the people whose tradition the hero bespeaks must not deny the love of Svava and forsake Helgi.

Progress makes recurring demands on people before it ever consents to be recognized. The lyrical poem, "Við Verkalok" ("At Labour's End"), written in 1883, illustrates an experience recognizable to anyone who passes each day in back-breaking, manual labour. However fine a day may have been, it passes by unseen by a farmer bent over his work. The portent of the day first gauged by the weather, is finally measured by what work has been accomplished. The sun slanting westward signals its finality "og eftir dagsverk friðnum natur fagnar / hvert fjörmagn þreytt -" (Stephansson Andv. I:303)[46].

The farmer becomes a poet and, released from the day's demands, marks its passing with a metaphor equating evening with the end of his life. This is a common idea which can be powerful as well, if handled gracefully as has Stephansson. "Við verkalok" culminates with this metaphor, but introduces a new element of optimism in spite of the finality of life; the poet aspires to be writing "eins klökkan

brag" that by so doing he reconciles himself with life and its inevitable end (Stephansson Andv. I:304)[47]. This the poet can only accomplish if his life's work has been assessed as productive and useful by society and therefore his debt to it rendered in full. Such a life-long goal is deemed necessary by the poet and he knows no contradictory desire, therefore his life is "fullt af hvíld og fögnuð" (Stephansson Andv. I:304)[48]. He expresses the desire that he should know the same tranquility as he writes his final poem.

Stephansson's optimism was profound rather than naïve. In "Reconstruction" (1919), the poet satirizes the false offer of progress by reestablishment of the old order of life, which was a political offer peddled to people after the war. The principal metaphor of the poem becomes an allegory in which politicians are rats on an unseaworthy ship precariously tied to the pier. Instead of deserting a ship about to sink, these rats hold council, profaning everything, even the old hulk, by their presence. Their president, "Tanngnjóður," stands up and declares that the good ship, "Rothrip," will sail the next day (Stephansson Andv. III:191)[49]. After his speech the president calls all the rats to the task of gnawing out the old hulk's hold. Ironically, the ship, as decrepit as it is, is nevertheless reluctant to take on such a cargo as these rats, and will sail with only such insurance as good luck will offer, and attempt to steer around shipwreck.

Stephansson's satire of the megalomania of the governing rats in "Reconstruction," and the paradox of enemy soldiers conversing in "Vopnahlé," condemn imperialism for its oppression of mankind. The poet's historical perspective of the salient features of feudalism and capitalism from the point of view of the peasant and the worker respectively, is presented in "Vopnahlé." The young soldier alludes to the older one's protection of the fatherland as being the reason he fights. The old soldier replies with a paradoxical statement: that he does not have six feet of fatherland anywhere because his family had been tenant farmers for generations, dispossessed of their land. "Óðalsherrann minn," as the old soldier refers to the present owner of the land, sits at home while the old man is sent to defend it (Stephansson Andv. III:136)[50]. The old soldier inquires of the younger whether it is not the same with him. He replies that he is just a commodity for those who profit by his labour. This description of the background of each soldier is indicative of the poet's perspective on political theory. Stephansson opposed capitalism and imperialism and began to view socialism as the only guarantee of the progress of humanity.

### 3.2.3 Stephansson's View of Politics

By the beginning of the 1890's Stephansson was settled in Markerville had begun writing many poems about current

political issues as well as presenting portraits of social relations. The poem "Transvaal" is one of his anti-imperialist poems and takes its theme from the Boer War of 1899. In the poem, he condemns the British imperialist invasion of South Africa; his support for national liberation struggles never faltered. In fact, the main reason for the opposition to Stephansson's ideas among the conservative elements of the Icelandic-Canadian communities was that he was unequivocally opposed to imperialist war and capitalist dictate. The ambitious within the community were preparing to step into the mainstream of nascent monopoly capitalist society in Canada, the preserve of the bourgeois class, which promoted nationalism and democracy, but did not disguise the fact that it accepted the status of Canada as a colony and capitalism as its economic system. In order to gain acceptance within this realm, such members of the Icelandic communities needed to downplay their democratic cultural inheritance and promote individual gain over collective needs. Stephansson attempted to warn the Icelandic people against their activities, which appeared to him to be destined to undermine the communities. Many of his poems demonstrate the poet's abhorrence of imperialism. Each of the following poems is an indictment of colonialism and imperialism: "Indiánar" ("The Indians"; 1889), "Transvaal" ("Transvaal"; 1899), "Rennes" ("Rennes"; 1899), "Filipseyjar" ("The Philippine Islands"; 1899), "Patrekur frændi" ("Patrick, My Relative"; 1898) and "Pétursborg" ("Petersburg"; 1905). In

addition to these, his major work, the cycle of poems, "Vígslóði," containing 38 poems written during a period of nine years, from 1914 to 1923, constitute a call to oppose imperialist war. All the poems mentioned in this subsection on politics, with the exception of "Norður sléttuna," are from "Vígslóði." The poet sought the best methods to express his hatred of imperialist war and exploitation, constantly varying them. He wrote poetry and articles for the Icelandic newspapers, addressed community gatherings, and discussed contemporary issues with poets, scholars, priests and community members. He was determined to influence the Icelandic people not to remain passive but oppose this threat to humanity.

Stephansson believed the cause of war to be interimperialist rivalry, political in nature, beginning in military manoeuvres and ending in conflagration. It was not an unknown evil which suddenly descended on mankind periodically in order to provide a "natural" check on population growth as philosophers such as Malthus had imagined[51]. He repeatedly demonstrates these conclusions in "Vígslóði." One could even surmise that his analysis of the nature of imperialism and his conclusions about the source of war were a profound lesson learned from personal experience. While Stephansson was yet in Iceland, he learned that his people aspired to national independence. He learned of the struggle of other people for the same objectives. He likely did

not begin to understand the nature of the oppressor, who maintained control in each country until he experienced the direct effects of intermonopoly rivalry in the United States. The analogy between the rivalry of companies and that of great powers could then be made, and from that point many features of each would have fallen into place. This premise follows definite changes in the themes of his poems from the denunciation of capital in cryptic images, such as those in "Norður sléttuna" to blatant attacks on imperialism using simple but powerful imagery, such as in "Ekkjan í Windsor" ("The Widow at Windsor"):

Ó, England, þínir úrvals-menn,  
þeir eru hvar? Á Heljarslóð,  
und dánarblæjum beityngs,  
við bárukjökurs erfiljóð!  
(Stephansson Andv. III:196)[52].

The attitude of the poet is also demonstrated in his taking up the cause of the people for national liberation against imperialism and utilizing his craft to that purpose. "Norður sléttuna" is an excellent example of Stephansson's poetic repertoire, serving to illustrate his passionately held convictions about struggling for freedom from the oppression of capitalism and its destruction of culture and people. The fact that he places the blame for the catastrophe of war not on the people, but rather capitalism, is a related aspect of his views.

The principal reason for the poet's virulent attack on the Icelandic-Canadians' participation in the imperialist

First World War was that he viewed it as a flagrant contravention of the people's opposition to war and therefore a breach of honour. Icelanders had never maintained a standing army nor served as mercenaries in other armies. There had been virtually no major crime in the country in recent centuries. The people considered themselves to be independent, although they relied on each other and had social custom to govern human interrelations. They had democratic aspirations. Their standards were established through tradition, but were being undermined by British imperialism in Canada. British imperialism was the very power the poet had criticized in poems of the previous twenty years in relation to events which had occurred in other countries.

"Hleiðra" (1914), is an epic within the "Vígslóði" cycle, which refers to an ancient Danish king's court (Lejre, Zealand) and describes the events of the imperialist war in terms of the ancient heroic stories. The names of both heroes, Hjalti and Bjarki, are taken from "Bjarkamál" ("The Lay of Bjarki"), while the whole poem is nearly a parody of "Bjarkamál." [53] Hjalti accuses Bjarki of cowardice because he does not fight, though others have been killed in the name of the king's honour and wealth. The king demands Bjarki's obeisance. Hjalti challenges Bjarki: "Situr þú ragur við að verjast / voðanum, þegar aðrir berjast?" (Stephansson, Andv. III:129) [54]. Bjarki answers by striking the sword from Hjalti's hand, then calling to the people

with his trumpet. Bjarki then predicts that "Hleiðra" will fall, the enemies will fight all the way to Hel's hall, brothers will revolt against brothers, men's blood will flood the land and Thor will contest the Midgard serpent[55]. In "Hleiðra," the poet attempted the framework of allegory to convey the importance of the anti-imperialist stand which he believed every democratic person should take.

A poem in the "Vígslóði" cycle, "Þegar ég var ritstjóri" ("When I Was an Editor"), uses hyperbole and irony to satirize the Icelandic-Canadian newspapers' stance in favour of the war. Stephansson declares that were he the editor, great tears would spring to his eyes if someone were lashed and that his state would worsen if the man were hanged! But before the worst ravages of the planet, terror and murder, he would become silent and indecisive. The editor Stephansson satirizes in the poem would behave in such a way because he cared little about people and would rather live and play with fashion, although he he would like to be thought of as a sympathetic person as well. as Stephansson remarks satirically of the editor in the poem. Therefore, he would sit with his "... samvizku-rengdur. / En svo hún ei gelti né gæfi af sér hljóð" (Stephansson Andv. III:171)[56]. He continues: "Ég falsaði afsökun í hana trúð / og eggjandi mína þjóð ..." (Stephansson, Andv. III:171)[57]. The false pretences of those who exalt democracy to conceal barbarism are more evident in those whose actions are undertaken in

the public view. As a matter of fact, an editor who promotes conscription is indirectly responsible for inciting youth to their deaths in an ignoble cause, while maintaining the posture of a highly sensitive, cultured person who opposes an occasional ineptitude of the system of justice, fashionably, but goes no further than he must to maintain his equilibrium, nothing less than his present status.

As a poet who believed in progress, Stephansson took up his self-assigned duties vigorously. He attacked any indication of retrogression in his community. He criticized the Canadian government for following the orders of the British monarch by sending Canadians to fight in an imperialist war, World War I. He perceived an intensification of a conservative and retrogressive outlook within the Icelandic communities and attributed it to the increased power of capitalism within colonial Canada. He denounced the gradual destruction of progressive culture within the communities. The poem, "Vopnahlé," emphasizes what Stephansson considers to be the illusions of the imperialist propaganda of the day; the two soldiers destroy each of these through analysis, using the Socratean method along with antithesis and irony as their instruments of examination. This they achieve even while they are being deprived of their right to live, in order to reclaim their innocence and to know peace.

Stephansson demonstrates that one of the reliable sources of creating illusions for the bourgeoisie is religious

obscurantism, which is a means of guaranteeing chauvinism among the people, as the war has shown. In "Vopnahlé," the poet condemns the church in both of the protagonists' countries. The soldiers question each other about the motives of their respective countries. They find that in each case peace was promoted by the capitalists, the literati, politicians and the church right up to the verge of war. Then, paradoxically, they fell over each other trying to be the first to declare the war a necessity. The capitalists wished the war "Loka-sennan ... að vera / vitnið bezta um trúna sína á friðinn" (Stephansson Andv. III:137)[58]. Their solemn promises to maintain peace had evaporated. When the soldiers asked each other whether the other fought out of religious zeal, they found that each criticized his church for its complicity. The old soldier decries the church's paradoxical consecration of his weapons for killing and pledges that never again would he turn to religion. He asks "Til hvers myndi að flýja / bróðerni og friðsemd, meðal manna / meinbægðu, á náðir fornra venja trúar, / sem í tvær þúsundir alda / tekizt hefir siðabótin okkar/ eins og þessi völlum hérna vottar" (Stephansson Andv. III:140)[59]. This is the poet's conclusion resulting from a long process of examining the precepts of religion and measuring them against the deeds of the religious functionaries and the needs of the people. He uncovered the political nature of the church's historical power and position. The actions of the priests during the war were for him the height of hypoc-

ris and worthy only of condemnation. The poet no longer withheld his denunciation of religion, declaring that it conspired to obscure factual reality for political reasons.

The reader is impelled to reach to the ineluctable conclusion that imperialist war is an inhuman assault on the people, who are coerced into the armies to die fighting for the interest of their oppressors. The portrait of the subjection of the two soldiers who are intelligent, kind and committed to their families, even at the price of their lives, is a greater attack on imperialist war than any other portrayal would have been because of its psychological proximity to everyman. The reader may even feel the same imminent upheaval.

A more realistic portrayal of the damage done to the soldiers arbitrarily and maliciously could hardly be conveyed than by the images which spill from "Vopnahlé," Stephanson's major anti-war poem. Although he had no experience of the conditions of war, it was not a difficult assumption for him to make that lack of rights and purpose would govern the soldiers' thoughts, and consequently they would not be free to decide their fate. This idea was a factor in his condemnation of war. In "Vopnahlé," the poet sculpts two lives out of the mud and blood of the war trenches. Each of these human creatures is bound to death and will be in effect executed by the society which had already exposed him to great danger. To such a society no one owes allegiance,

states the poet, and thereby steps beyond any liberal superciliousness to declare himself in favour of social change.

After the war ended, the poet did not cease his attack; he warned people to beware of those powerful proponents of war who still governed their countries and who began to offer tokens of peace and reconstruction with no sign of shame as the poem "Reconstruction" indicates. The poet chose satire as his medium of expression for the poem "Reconstruction."

"Reconstruction" satirizes the attempts of the political scavengers at the end of the war to rearrange the destruction of war to suit themselves. The poem is preceded by the comment: "... Svo nefndu stjórnálaskúmar umbóta-heitorð sín við alþýðu, sem þeir kæmu á að loknu stríðinu," which referred to "Reconstruction" (Stephansson, Andv. III:190)[60]. It is divided into two parts, the first consisting of four verses which describe the post-war conditions in metaphorical terms; some rats are politicians while an old hulk of a ship represents a country. The second part consists of a couplet which is counterposed in theme to the first part, its antithesis. The sailors, who are ready to sign onto the old hulk, hesitate on shore and quietly inquire about the rats.

Stephansson held a passionate desire for knowledge, wisdom and culture; he hoped that each person would cherish and

utilize them. He was not elitist, thinking his capabilities beyond the reach of other mortals, rather he believed in the innate abilities of people as individuals and as members of communities, nations and the world. He encouraged people to take up all opportunities to improve their talents and to donate their expertise to their society. Society, for the poet, meant society after the expulsion of the exploiters. He exhorted his readers to create a more civilized ambience within which to nurture humanity. Such thoughts of rights and duties of individuals and societies never released him from his struggle toward his goal. This goal was none other than to contribute to the achievement of human civilization free from exploitation. Stephansson was not a pacifist, but an anti-war activist, because he opposed imperialist war, while supporting the right of nations to engage in wars of liberation such as the Boers did against British colonialism and the Russians against the Czar.

### 3.3 IDEALISM IN STEPHANSSON'S PHILOSOPHY

#### 3.3.1 The Idealist View of Life

Idealism, in philosophical terms, refers to the mystical or metaphysical approach to reality. Stephan G. Stephansson's thought contained elements of idealism. For example, the poet was first attracted to freethinking because he desired to find a theoretical framework for his ideas, one on which he could rely to analyze his experiences. Free-

thinking had a strong moral aspect as well as a critical element and this intrigued him (cf. McCracken 1982:45-47). A philosophy which he might take interest in must provide a theory for, among other things, several questions such as that of the mutual obligation between individual and society. The freethinkers proposed a moral link between individual and society as well as the view that all interrelations must be ethical. One of the freethinkers of whom Stephansson thought highly was Adler, a non-theist who advocated "The Deed, not the Creed" (cf. Brown and Stein 1978:60). This view is opposed to that of the scientific theorists who state that all relations between individuals and society are based on economic relations, and that an individual's attitude toward life is an expression of these relations. Therefore, social relations are objective and not based on abstract morals. But Stephansson thought that the moralist view was ideal enough to provide the basis for the cultural society he founded in Garður in 1888, "Hið íslenska mennin-garfélag."

The ethereal abstractions of Adler, the positions of the deists and the latent individualism of the freethinkers combined to form an influence contradictory to that of the traditionally democratic "lestrarfélög" of Iceland, whose purpose had been the education and preparation of the people for the struggle for national liberation. In Canada, the cultural society could not have the same impact on the whole

nation and therefore lost its greater political dimension. Under these conditions it provided a forum for debate and for abstract reasoning.

One form of idealism is religious obscurantism. It attempts to deny all progressive motion in life in favour of the static; it obscures reality to prevent people from gaining intellectual independence from dogmatic religious views which have solidified into a political position of maintenance of the status-quo, quite apart from the moral and spiritual realm, although in the supposed defence of the latter. Stephansson exposes the role of the church in society:

'...Hitt kann vera að í þínu landi  
heilög kirkja og öflug, svo sem okkar,  
altarisklæðin beri þar á vopnin.'  
'Nei, hún leysir nú úr óefninu  
nauðalíkt og ykkar...' (Stephansson Andv.  
III:139) [61].

Religious obscurantism encourages pessimism in people's thoughts because it presents daily life as a negative form of existence, a way-station on the road to "salvation." An abstract moral purity is more important than life itself, according to this point of view. Religious obscurantism proffers a pessimistic attitude toward life on earth, promising a beatific but intangible "paradise" in its stead. The poet was more analytical in his analysis of the church's role in society than to accept any justification of social injustice on the basis of such obscure ideas.

Despite his optimistic view of humanity and its future, Stephansson was accused of being "þungur og torskilinn" in his poetry by one whose living depended on people's belief in the "other worldliness" (Stephansson Bréf IV:279)[62]. In reply to Reverend Friðrik Bergmann's labelling him as "... konungur í ríki 'pessimistanna' hjá oss Íslendingum", Stephansson answered that "Svartsýnið í kveld varð sannsýni á morgun." [63] Listin er ekki það eitt, að allar sögur endi vel" (Stephansson, Bréf IV:280)[64]. This reply was written in an article entitled "Í veðrinu út af 'Vafurlogum'" in 1907 (Stephansson, Bréf IV:275)[65].

Stephansson did not easily discard his idealist views, but fought to maintain them. He cast off the religious obscurantist mantle, but immediately donned another much the same and called it Reason. In the modern age, Reason can be a more attractive god to enshrine. For the poet, Reason performed a dramatic entrance where political matters were concerned, but did not always conquer, as the dialogue of the two soldiers in "Vopnahlé" indicates, in which a materialist exposure of the role of religion and of ideology is given.

Stephansson's epic poem, "Vopnahlé," is based on the premise of a chance meeting in the trench of a soldier from each side, an occurrence which was apparently not infrequent during the war. The ensuing discussion ranges over many issues while the attitude of each endears him to the other.

"Vopnahlé" begins with an apostrophe consisting of a prologue followed by an epilogue, the former intimating the substance of the poem, and the latter offering a summation. The epilogue states that: "Taki ei vit á tilfinningu / taumhaldið ... Hún hefur verið voði íhöndum / vanhyggju í öllum löndum" (Stephansson Andy. III:132)[66]. Here the poet pays respect to the idealist version of life, that by a ready appeal to Reason or the abstract power beyond humanity, the quandary one is facing would unravel of itself. But no sooner does the poet state this than he abandons his intention and finally disproves his own contention, confirming that Reason alone will not prevent war. After a profound discussion about the features of capitalism, imperialism and war, the two soldiers leap up at the sound of bugle and drum ready to resume wearing the blinkers of an unnatural enmity once more. The source of war is not vague, it can be deduced by examination of the motives and actions of the countries involved together with all pertinent historical data. Stephansson was concerned not only with stating such factors, but also with drawing moral conclusions. The two modes of thinking, materialist and idealist, led in opposite directions and this prevented him from making a conclusive statement on war in "Vopnahlé." The poem's prologue and epilogue, which call for the observance of Reason in the affairs of men, while the body of the poem contradicts this position, indicate that imperialist war is not undertaken by reasonable men and will not be settled by Reason, can only be considered pessimistic or satirical.

The first few poems of "Vígslóði" express the poet's rage and despair. The cycle opens with "Ræfladans" ("The Wretches' Dance"; 1911) and the lines "Dönsum nú hratt svo hlekkjanna okkar við njótum! / ... stígum nú dans á spjótum (Stephansson, Andv. III:121)[67]. "Ræfladans" is followed by "Assverus," written during the winter of 1913-1914, before the war broke out. This poem reflected the poet's thoughts on recent political events and his conclusion that they added up to war, as he explained in a letter to Jón Jónsson frá Sleðbrjót:

Í mér var óhugur, ótti um framtíðarfrið í heimi vorum. Mér vaktist up margt ísbyggilegt, svo sem brugg stórveldanna svo nefndu, eftir Balkanskaga stríðið, langa þingið þeirra í Algeciras, þar sem Frakkar fengu Marocco, Englendingar einræði í Egyptalandi og í Þjóðverja var slett sneið af Afríku til bráðabirgða-sætta, og fleira kom mér í hug. Í hvort tveggja skiptið stóð mannheimur á öndinni, að til alþjóðastríðs myndi draga. Að ekki varð úr, þakka sumir því, að Balkanskagaþófið stóð svo lengi yfir, að verkalýðsforingjar og jafnaðarmenn í fjarlægum löndum um kolanámaverkfall í Vesturheimi og á Englandi svo öflugt, að öll flutningafari tepptust, af til stáls ætti að sverfa ... Upp úr þessu kvað ég Assverus. Sendi Eimreiðinni hann. (Stephansson, Bréf IV:348-349)[68].

The poet's despair seems to be heightened by his understanding of what is at stake, who the antagonists were going to be, and the fact that war seemed inevitable.

But the poet is cognizant of the causes of war and makes them explicit within "Vopnahlé." At the same time, he cannot reconcile himself to the elements of the human condition he accepts as fact: that of people's great aspirations and of their simultaneous exploitation. Here the poet supposes

a utopian ideal to be realizable, suggesting that the people should be able to confront their oppressors and by the exercise of Reason, win their freedom. It must be remembered that Stephansson had a tremendous belief in human potential and in life itself and lived by a traditionally democratic attitude. Part of his duty as he conceived it to be was to fight rigorously to maintain that ethical code within the communities he could influence. He also believed that if the people took up such a mode of life, they could change society. The two soldiers in "Vopnahlé" meet when each has plummeted to the depths of despair as a human being. They live through a reprieve in the fighting and recognize each other as human, a noble feat under the circumstances.

Almost as a refutation of their humanism at the end of the poem, the poet has them sacrifice themselves for the illusion that they are fighting for peace, an illusion that could only enter their minds when the trumpets called them back to their job of killing. The only choice they have is the one they mocked just minutes before. Therefore, the conclusion is drawn that no one could offer a plausible excuse for supporting militarism, for supporting one imperialist power against another, since it reduces people to such an inhuman state of mind. The lesson is unequivocal and each of the two soldiers is a teacher of truth, although it is by negative example. This elevates their imminent death at each other's hands to that of heroes pre-destined to mar-

tyrdom. The poet's portrait is one of people stripped of their moral obligation to society and, therefore of any moral obligation to each other. They now merely await death or an impossible dream of a peace paid for with the death of a "... valinn heimamann úr húsi / heimsins hverju ... og eftirsjáin brytist / inn um hverjir dyr og settist niður / óvelkomin, aldrei til að víkja ..." and this would be a lesson which could not be ignored (Stephansson Andv. III:157-158)[69]. Yet it would be understandable if his readers questioned Stephansson's solution for ending war. For a humanist to propose that a person might be selected from each home the world over and killed so that the experience might shock their families and force them to give up their "ideas of conquest," is inconsistent, to say the least. Pessimism may grip an individual's mind and render him inconsequential or dangerous to his society. Moral lessons taught by such a pessimist would be of doubtful value.

### 3.3.2 Stephansson and the Idealist View of Humanity

Stephansson's belief in mutual responsibility between the individual and society is descended from the Icelandic code of social ethics maintained over centuries through necessity. The poet understood this code through his experience and extended it to form a basis for understanding political events in later years. Every person was bound to his family through the preservation of its honour. The same concept

was extended to the nation in the eighteenth century through the efforts of poets and scientific-minded men. Stephansson extended the idea of honour as a useful guide to the Icelandic settlements in North America and thought it would serve the world's people as well. It is correct and obligatory to support the interest of the people and to express one's views, according to Stephansson.

The question of society and the individual's attitude towards it, is the theme of "Útlegðin" as well, but another aspect of allegiance becomes evident throughout the poem:

Fóstran gekk mér aldrei alveg  
 í þess móður stað,  
 það var eitthvað á sem skorti -  
 ekki veit ég hvað!  
 Og því hef ég arfi hennar  
 aldrei vera sagzt.  
 Þó hefur einhver óviðkynning  
 okkar milli lagzt  
 (Stephansson Andv. I:102)[70].

The inheritance offered to the exile by his foster land is valued less because it seems to be proffered arbitrarily and not based on an assessment of the exile's attitudes toward humanity and society. There is a sense of artificial separation between the exile and his adopted land. He is not certain of its meaning. The exile is not even asked for his opinions; "fóstran" has no interest in them. She keeps her other children at a distance from the exile so that he cannot discern their values or discuss them, as he had presumably been able to do in his home country. This adds to his sense of alienation, which is so profound that he is not

certain of what could be lacking in his relationship to his adopted land. The exile may have correctly analyzed the attitude of "fóstran," but his subjective decision to refuse her heritage amounts to an acceptance of on-going exile and therefore a justification of his isolation and individual customs. It is a refusal to partake of the experiences of the society beyond the limits of the Icelandic communities, and a move toward utopic isolation.

The nationalist poem, "1874," demonstrates the poet's attention to analyzing events. His assessment of the opposing forces' strength, in which he intimates that the enemy might be stronger, but that does not mean the people should falter, is a testament to his nationalism. His analysis notwithstanding, the nation Stephansson perceives is not divided into classes, and therefore there is no specific role for the working class. The modern division of classes was just coming into being in countries which had some established industry, such as France. Iceland's economy was still primitive and the government was one of a colonial outpost. The concept of a people undivided by class was brought to America with the Icelandic immigrants and applied wrongly there. There was a class division in the United States which could not be ignored nor disputed. Stephansson seems to have maintained this Icelandic view, which was considered to be non-scientific by dialectical materialists such as Marx and Engels, over against his later support of

socialism; he did give importance to the Marxist view that the working class is the revolutionary class which will impel society forward. Yet it was the Marxist views which did not contradict his interest as a farmer that Stephansson accepted. This resulted in some ambiguity in his perspective on politics. Stephansson's understanding of economics, politics and philosophy was derived directly from experience, but was limited by it as well.

In "Vopnahlé" the images of destruction are presented as paradoxical, counterposed to another reality, that of peace, which has been arbitrarily severed from the present and has become unattainable. The views of the soldiers often contain antitheses which imply the revolt of the human mind against itself under such conditions of degradation. The two soldiers are uncomfortably aware of their status of being considered as brutes who are ignorant enough to be expected to kill on demand. The reader is compelled to ponder the soldiers' views and assess them. Their dialogue is dialectical where they examine the causes of war and the conditions of their respective countries as well as their own emotional reactions. Thus the didactic purpose of the poem is achieved in a cadence of exposures delivered alternately in vivid images and sparse descriptions. Yet, one paradox in the dialogue near the end of the poem subverts its theme and presents an unreasonable "solution" to war in one utterance by the old soldier, where he comforts himself

with the idea that if one person from every home were killed, war would end. He ends his speech with a summons: "Og nú er rýmt til fyrir okkur!" (Stephansson Andv. III:158)[71]. The unreasonable is presented as plausible and the soldiers become martyrs instead of comrades in arms against imperialism. Were they destined to kill each other so that no amount of reasoning on their part could divert them from the abyss, their destiny. In order to avoid such tragedy, Reason must be called to the service of men, as the poet pleads in the prologue and epilogue of the poem.

In his criticism of the values of his adopted land in "Útlegðin," Stephansson indicates that the isolated type of settlement the immigrants found themselves in was not entirely satisfactory to him; the utopian idyll of the Icelandic communities was not beyond criticism, but there was reticence as well towards his community becoming engulfed by the surrounding society. The arbitrariness of the soldiers' final decision in "Vopnahlé" conjures up the ancient idea of Fate, which bears a resemblance to the concept of the Absolute in terms of idealist philosophy.

### 3.3.3 Stephansson and the Idealist View of Politics

Stephan G. Stephansson's striving for truth led him as far as he could go without formal knowledge of social science, of the theories of Marx, Engels and Lenin. At this juncture Stephansson's methods failed him. The materialist

outlook required rigorous scientific analysis based on a thorough understanding of history. The poems he wrote after the Russian revolution carried the same themes as before, but sometimes included a reference to workers poised in a critical stance, assessing events. The poet seemingly included himself among them as an onlooker.

Despite Stephannson's ability to analyze the causes of imperialist war, no solution other than the idealist one appeared possible to him at the time he wrote "Vopnahlé." Reason should prevail, according to the prologue and the epilogue of "Vopnahlé." This view is evident in the anti-war poems he wrote before 1917, the year the Russian revolution created a new political entity in the world. He visited Iceland during that year and was profoundly affected both by the historical event and the welcome he received in his homeland, which precipitated some changes in his political outlook. But because he had been shocked at the Icelandic-Canadians' response to conscription and had not analyzed it in detail, he preferred to rise against the attack on traditional Icelandic values and defend them. His disappointment in his people affected him deeply, but greater objectivity would have assisted him in this issue.

"Vopnahlé" expresses the quandary facing people under the extreme conditions of war, but avoids the issue of their political organization in their own defense. Rather than calling on the people to organize themselves, the poet

refers to three individuals as peacemakers who, he states, were wronged by their people or their governments; he does not state which is at fault. The references are vague.

The three individuals are Jean Jaures, A French social democrat, Karl Liebknecht, leader of the German Social Democratic Party and Kerr Hardie, an English Labour Member of Parliament. Of the three, the most significant misrepresentation of a leader of the people is the poet's inclusion of Karl Liebknecht among those who sought peace. The poet questions "... forlög foringjanna / fáu, þeirra er ekki hafa brugðið / friðarmæli sín og vildu ei svíkja / sannleikann í vorða? ... annar [Karl Liebknecht] er gerður / svívirðing í eigin hóp og dæmdur" (Stephansson Andv. III:157)[72]. Karl Liebknecht was charged with treason and thrown out of his party. He had represented the German Social Democratic Party at the Basle Conference in 1912, where all revolutionary parties met to discuss the international political situation. A decision was taken to oppose the manoeuvres of the imperial powers, and if war were declared by any of them, the revolutionary parties would organize to oppose it. They declared they would not fight for the national chauvinist or imperialist aims of their own countries' bourgeoisie. Karl Liebknecht agreed to the program, but when war broke out two years later, he called on the people to support Kaiser Wilhelm's chauvinism. This was not the act of an honourable leader. Stephansson's grief over Liebknecht is contradicto-

ry to his usual stance of condemnation of hypocrites. For example, he was quick to discern any hypocrisy in the views of the political leaders at home. He opposed war indefatigably; he did not spare anyone his criticism, if he suspected at all that person's sympathies. Nevertheless, his defense of three such individuals demonstrates that he allowed himself to rationalize and permitted the intrusion of subjectivity into his analysis.

Stephansson's views had a source in political theory; they stemmed from the ideas of Georg Brandes, a Danish utopian socialist and literary critic. Although he may not have read Brandes' work, Stephansson did admire Þorsteinn Erlingsson, an Icelandic poet who was much influenced by Brandes. Whether Stephansson's uncritical view towards utopian socialists was due to the influence of Brandes and Erlingsson or not, it does not alter the main purpose of the poem, "Vopnahlé," which is to condemn imperialist war.

"Ögranir" ("Challenges"; 1914), examines one aspect of the effect of war propaganda on social life and advises that whoever is excited and gushes about "challenges" should stay home, otherwise he:

hæst á múgamannsins,  
mannablót til fosturlandsins,  
viss að bera í sínum sjóði  
sæmd og auðlegð frá hans blóði,  
tómum köllum kokhreystinnar  
kaupa nafnbót lýðhyllinnar:  
Stærstan huga þurfti þá  
að þora að sitja hjá  
(Stephansson Andv. III:131)[73].

"Ögranir" reverses the challenges, their sources and connotations, evincing the fact that the braggart might rush to sign up for the army despite himself, not wishing to be thought a coward, even though his probable death would only contribute to the wealth of the war-profiteers. Let him take courage and forgo his recklessness. In the poem, Stephansson comments on the dash to death of the young men. What could the reasoning of these youths be? Bragging and fear of cowardice, perhaps? Here again the poet does not call on the young men to organize themselves, but challenges them not to defend themselves, suggesting that the moral stand they would therefore take is the correct one, even though it requires a martyr's attitude.

Stephansson persisted in maintaining the view that people were not interested in organizing themselves, despite the fact that he constantly encouraged them to do so. He was aware of the fact that people had great aspirations for freedom and democracy, but the fact that they could accept subjection and that some could even profit by it, argued against their determination. Although the success of the Russian revolution confirmed people's ability to achieve their goals, the poet did not write poems to honour the Russian revolutionaries nor the Russian people. His support of their cause was not entirely devoid of skepticism, by then a habitual inflection in his thought.

"Vígslóði" is a protest against injustice, against man's exploitation of man. The cycle of poems determines that monopoly capitalism brings about destruction and that the collusion and contention between imperialist powers causes war. Such a position was not acceptable to the conservative line of thought upheld by the individuals within the Icelandic community, who saw their prosperity as contingent upon how well they propounded the views of Imperial England, master of colonial Canada. The stalwarts of conservatism prevailed upon the Icelandic-Canadian newspapers to promote the war and the draft imposed by the Canadian government, which was enough proof of the state's subservience to British imperialism. These newspapers responded with pictures and stories of the "good Icelanders" who were doing their duty by their new country. Each issue of each paper contained such articles for the duration of the First World War. Although Stephansson's poetry was powerful, it could not prevail against the bourgeoisie without becoming a banner of the people in action, and history confirms that it did not.

## Chapter IV

### CONCLUSION

In summation of this discussion, it is necessary to ascertain whether Stephan G. Stephansson was an idealist or a materialist. The answer to this question must encompass the essential constructs of culture and the relative importance of philosophy within it. Basic to philosophy is epistemology in that it governs interpretation of phenomena (cf. Lenin 1972:111-115). There are two opposed epistemic theories. One states that perception occurs by means of the five senses and knowledge is thereby derived (cf. Lenin 1972:124). Consequently, the interpretation of phenomena is based on knowledge of the laws that govern the change, development, motion and interrelation of said phenomena (cf. Marx and Engels 1969:III:72, 355, 371-376). This is materialist epistemology. The other theory declares perception to be secondary and states that images of phenomena exist in human thought as their original source and the proof offered is that of the impossibility of interpretation without an original model for comparison. People would not understand the world if objective reality did not begin with the human intellect. Both theories have had great influence on human development through their application in culture. This is important because as a repository of collective experience,

culture enshrines past practice and germinates new thought. Consequently, the philosophy of a culture and the society it serves produces an interpretation of the past and an expectation of the future. The art of the poet is evaluated historically according to whether it serves the dominant philosophy of the culture which gave rise to it or not; the poets who are universally considered the greatest are those who champion humanity beyond the constraints it suffers.

A prolific poet such as Stephansson could not have sustained his creative ability without a positive attitude to counter the effect of his laborious life. His views were not acquired passively, but actively sought out by the poet. He established criteria by which he could assess the validity of new ideas, and reviewed his beliefs when changing conditions demanded it. He was born in a society whose values he thought worthy enough to maintain, even as they were contested by new conditions within another. It is significant that the society Stephansson first aligned himself against, the American society, was at that time the freest in the world. It had a constitution which had been borne of a people's democratic revolution. But monopolization was beginning to curtail the people's freedom and was inducing them to economic and political rivalry. The poet strove to gain knowledge of world literature and philosophy in order to understand the new conditions of life and to try and change them. Because Stephansson was not passive, but

accepted change, he accordingly sought a cohesive philosophical perspective which could answer satisfactorily the diverse questions which arose in his thoughts. It can be assumed from his letters that he did not deliberately set out to become a philosopher of one kind or another. All that can be justifiably stated is that his work reveals his gravitation toward a materialist outlook. This tendency is not so gradual as to run the risk of being overlooked, rather it is starkly evident throughout his work.

Stephansson changed from idealistic toward materialistic views as he sought solutions to the problems confronting him, his community and humanity. One of the most serious changes in outlook that Stephansson made, was that of rejecting the attitude of religion toward humanity. In his opinion, religion countered the natural progressive tendency of human development, by declaring human nature evil and promoting passivity among people. As he experienced the negative effects of religious obscurantism on people and their social life, he rejected such philosophy, but did not denounce it. He did not attack others on account of their beliefs, but questioned the sincerity of those who acted against their declared beliefs (cf. McCracken 1982:72-73).

He maintained the deist position that Christ was a moral man and the church hierarchy was to blame for the moral destruction of man because of its hypocrisy (cf. McCracken 1982:67-68 ). He believed that Christ was a revolutionary

and credited both him and Karl Marx with being the world's finest and most moral revolutionaries (cf. Stephansson Bréf og ritgerðir II:252). The conception of revolution as being merely the best method of correcting wrongs perpetrated against people by heartless overlords is the very moralist, that is to say idealist notion held by utopian socialists that Marx argued was wrong. To try to pursue political ideals by a moral means is treacherous; it has led to posturing, ineptitude and opportunism within revolutionary movements of people of various nations and at different times. The French revolutions provide examples of the clash between social classes, and the ideological expressions of these classes reveal their political goals. Marx's and Engels' historical materialism sliced through all early idealistic and moralistic philanthropic socialist discussion and set socialism on a scientific footing (cf. Bains 1984:17). One of their conclusions was that of the necessity of proletarian revolution to bring about a fundamental change in society, the replacement of the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie by that of the proletariat.

Do these facts then inevitably place Stephansson among the self-righteous philanthropists or the self-promoting opportunists? No, they do not. Although he may have had such tendencies, which is understandable since the society one lives in always leaves its mark, he fought against them. He enshrined his conception of truth as his measure of phil-

osophic value and strove to honour it. This attitude set him on the path towards materialist philosophy and enabled him to reject idealism insofar as he did. For example, his attitude towards religious obscurantism, at first merely critical, became an outright condemnation as a direct result of his analysis of political events. When war broke out and the churches inflamed their congregations against the "enemy," whereas prior to that time their sermons preached about peace and how to achieve it, the poet did not restrain his criticism. Stephansson concluded that a church, which preached the venomous propaganda of a state which, subject to another state's commands, surrendered its people to slaughter for the colonial aims of a belligerent state, was unpardonable. The churches acted as accomplices of the belligerent, colonial state, and because such behaviour seemed tantamount to an act of war against the very people who looked to them for guidance, their actions deserved to be denounced as criminal, according to the poet. The poems "Norður sléttuna" and "Vopnahlé" indicate the development of such a change of attitude in Stephansson. In "Norður sléttuna," churches are sardonically referred to as being equivalent to taverns both socially and ideologically, while "Vopnahlé" refers to the sinister and brutal meaning behind their seemingly wholesome rituals, when their support of the war is borne in mind (cf. pp. 74 and 83). list 3200:1

Each of Stephansson's conclusions resulted from an analysis of the current facts of the time and their interrelation. His poetical response at each of these times seems reasonable in terms of the existing conditions and was presented with the intention of addressing the people's interest. This example of Stephansson's assessment of one aspect of current ideology strongly favours the argument of his being a materialist. His motivation in writing both poems was to serve the interest of humanity by exposing the pretences of the institutions whose designated role was that of preserving the conservative status-quo, first by pacifying people and then inciting them to war against their own interest. Although the interests of humanity have been ascribed to idealists (in the common sense of the term), the idea being that lofty purpose in life is beyond the reach of common people, who are not considered idealistic, they are not inconsistent with the materialist philosophical outlook. Stephansson's materialist motivation is borne by his love of humanity, and advanced by his indefatigable optimism. Here it can be seen that optimism derives from a strong belief in humanity and in turn supports it. But as he became more vigorously analytical in his approach to life and learning, he felt obliged to expose his wayfaring way to others for their edification. He did not stop to refine his poems and expel from them his raw emotion. He wrote passionately and honestly and therefore all the deviations he passed through are not missing from his work, but markedly present and redolent in their contradictions.

His forthrightness was well-known to educated writers, poets and ministers whose ideas he sometimes criticized in his poems. Stephansson insisted he was just a farmer who scribbled a little. But the consciously conservative handful, whose positions depended upon a certain amount of credibility, rankled at the thought of the farmer whose courage did not seem to falter. There was an attempt to turn the Icelandic-Canadian communities against the poet. He paid the very price he tried to avoid: isolation from his people. He became an exile without having the traditional trial and the hero's choice of voluntary outlawry. Still, he could say that daylight brought with it an optimism which chased away the previous night's pessimism (cf. pp. 5, 48-49, 53-54, 57 and 64-66).

There is no precise path, no precise model to take which guarantees progress, but yet humanity must progress. Progress has had both evolutionary and revolutionary elements which have contributed to its advancement. Economic developments lead to changes in the ideological and political elements of social life. These changes have led to humanity's progress in emancipating itself from the demands of earlier, less progressive forms of social life which became restrictive and exploitive. Stephansson opposed religious obscurantism because he believed that it obscured the facts of economic and social relations in order to preserve the status-quo.

Stephansson believed that the goals of life for individuals and for all of humanity were concrete and must be achieved in the real world, not in an imaginary one at the behest of some indescribable deity (cf. pp. 57 and 61-62). Whenever he referred to religious works, it was because of his concern over morals and their relation to society, which he then related to the life of his community. This was important to him, because he sensed the instability in the community dynamics due to the people's confrontation with great changes in all aspects of their lives as a result of their emigration from Iceland. For this reason he utilized Felix Adler's idea of an ethical society and applied it to his community in its entirety with the exclusion of the idea of having a religious functionary to chair it, as Adler had proposed. The poet attempted to put his ideas into practice and realized that good intentions do not convince anyone to give up his own interest in favour of his enemy's.

Stephansson rejected religious obscurantism because it denied humanity its history, its present and its future. He rejected this form of idealism, but retained his belief in another: utopian societies. The fact that he chose to promote the idea of an utopian society, based on a group of Icelandic nationals and set at a distance from other influences confirms that he had an idealistic conception of community which he strove to attain (cf. pp. 3-4, 27-28, 34-35, 40-43, 57-59, 60, 77, 85-87 and 88-89). Although the commu-

nities he belonged to were formed out of necessity and not necessarily based on some utopian socialist model, they were similarly isolated and organized with the intention of maintaining a special culture. The Icelandic settlers' plan for their communities was more of a romantic one than one based on religious exceptionalism or a specifically utopian program.

Stephansson's concern over the threats to his community which amounted to the loss of its identity, compelled him to examine the elements of the new society by means of its literature (cf. pp. 32-33 and 37-40). Rather than scientific examination, he preferred a tangential one. Therefore, although the conclusions he drew seemed true, they were also inexact and difficult to substantiate. For example, his views with regards to classes within society were contradictory. Imperialism, in his view, is unreasonably exploitive, and reason should prevail against it, not necessarily class struggle. War is unreasonable, and people should keep their heads by using reason as a weapon against it, in the poet's opinion, although he knew that such a solution would not suffice against implacable enemies as the great powers, which were engaged in making profits from destruction. Reason must perform the office of a god. Such contradictory ideas in the poet's outlook are revealed in the poem "Vopnahlé." At the same time, the poet was aware of a new and concrete force, the working class, which society had pro-

duced, independent of human will or reason, and which would confront imperialism, although he did not understand the full implications of this fact (cf. pp. 5, 60-61, 69-70, 75-76, 79 and 80-82).

Another measure of Stephansson's views, which is substantiated by his poetry, is that of his treatment of nature and humanity within it. Stephansson actively pursued progressive change in the communities he lived in. His thoughts led him to views more progressive than the community was prepared to entertain. These he expressed in poetry. It can be deduced from Stephansson's participation in the social life of the community that he held democratic principles and defended them. He remained within the church in order to strike a blow for women's rights and to include himself in community decision-making (cf. pp. 35-38). He was always governed by ideals, but thought at first that ideals could be changed into reality through the collective effort of people. Later, he understood that the collective effort required a collective will as a motivating force, and such a task could not be undertaken without principles and a purpose with which all agreed. He developed a custom of summarizing his work and measuring it against his views, adopting new facts and reassessing his actions. He never ceased to evaluate events and views of his own or others. Upholding the social responsibility of the individual to society was a principle that permeated Stephansson's poetry.

It was not only an expression of the Icelandic people's social values, but also of their political attitudes which were discussed in their literary societies as well as in newspaper articles (cf. pp. 4-6, 11, 14, 15-0, 23-28, 30, 40-43, 44-48, 59-60, 64-66, 69-71, 73-73 and 85).

Powerful sentiment is sufficient for expression in poetry, but Stephansson demanded more in accuracy of depiction and in analysis. He seemed to write on a theme when it appeared fully clear to him. In this well-considered approach of weighing all the factors bearing on an issue, that is the interrelation of all phenomena, he demonstrates the historical materialist perspective. His insistence on experience as the basis of knowledge is equivalent to the materialist position that perception occurs through the five senses. The realization of human potential is increased by experience, and objective truth becomes evident by an accumulation of experiences and analysis. Although Stephansson assessed his understanding of life through his own experiences, he did not limit himself to his own individual perspective, but subscribed to a variety of newspapers and journals and exchanged views by letter with a number of friends.

It is not surprising that those of his poems which portray an aspect of nature should be presented more readily from an observer's standpoint than those which contain political references. He clearly understood the relation-

ship of humanity to nature; it was not something about which he could afford to be abstract (cf. pp. 52-57, 62, 64-66, 75 86, 89-92). What he attempted to do beyond reacting to his immediate environment was to apply his knowledge of natural processes of change, development and motion to other phenomena; he was not always accurate or successful. He extended his knowledge through literature and current news and read the controversial works of the major authors of his time, thereby absorbing knowledge of conditions of life which he would never experience directly. His portrayal of the motivation and actions of the bourgeoisie, especially during the war, was the result of his capacity for analysis in conjunction with his experience and the images contained in the works of such authors as Honoré de Balzac and Charles Dickens. This depiction appears in his poetry as the result of an analytical thought process such as that of Balzac, combined with the clarity of an astute observer, but one who nevertheless, like Dickens, remained excluded from the élite circles. Just as Balzac and Dickens took a partisan stand against the bourgeois class and its ideology, so did Stephansson.

The conclusion to be drawn from these facts with regard to Stephansson's views is that they were based on experience and developed over time. His experience of politics, while indirect in Iceland, became a matter of importance in the United States; the contradiction between life in the two

countries would have been worth his examination. His condemnation of monopoly and of capitalism, found expression in his poetry several decades later. In Canada he reached his maturity as a poet, and in Canada his passion for social justice, and human progress continued to be his main motif.

No one with a negative view of human nature nor any political opportunist with self-glorification in mind would sacrifice his life in the pursuit of truth, as Stephansson did, and pursue it relentlessly, even though it meant changing his views. Such a person would have become satisfied with his conclusions and promoted them as truth at some point along the way. But Stephansson did not quit, rather he continued his investigation until his death. Decades of sleepless nights, insufficient food and hard labour took their toll and his last decade was one of increasingly poor health. Despite some lingering idealistic conceptions, Stephansson's philosophy was increasingly that of a materialist, and his dedication to the progress of humanity was based on materialist views.

NOTES

- [1] Marx, Karl and Frederick Engels V.III 1969:132-134.
- [2] The religious controversy in the Icelandic communities will be further discussed in subsection 2.1 Life Experience Pervades Poetry in chapter II of this paper.
- [3] The Hansa merchants had monopolized trade in the Baltic area in the 1400's thus limiting Denmark's markets.
- [4] Jón Sigurðsson was the leader of the nationalists who spent most of his life negotiating Iceland's independence from Denmark.
- [5] "Icelanders have never accepted the absolute rule of the Danes nor any other nation." All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.
- [6] "...peasant farmers 82%, ship owners, merchants and guesthouse owners 8%, craftsmen, workers and paupers 5% and officials, clergy and scholars 5%".
- [7] "...achieve that type of middle class (bourgeoisie) in Iceland as in other countries then it is obvious that our peasant farmer class must take the place of the middle class".
- [8] "...during Akureyri's publishing age when it had just come into being with 'Norðri' and 'Fróðlega' and their collection of poetry".
- [9] "'Norðri' had ceased publication at the end of the previous year (1861)..."
- [10] "...hint of something which you (their correspondents) have never seen nor heard of...that is the Revolution".
- [11] "Þjóðfundurinn" (The National Meeting) was held in 1848 at "Þingvellir" (Parliament Grounds) in order to reinforce Jón Sigurðsson's policies for independence. The Icelandic independence movement was inspired by the revolutions of 1848, while the restoration of the Alþing in 1843 was of symbolic importance (Nordal and Kristinsson 1975:150).
- [12] "On July 1 (1861), a meeting of the Alþing was held...Never before had there been so many and commoner proposals on political reform than now..."
- [13] "Jón Sigurðsson...began to let himself be heard regarding politics with 'Ný félagsrit' 1841."

- [14] "The society had existed for 10 or 11 years ... For that sum [unspecified] they [the societies] bought books for the Education Society, "Norðanfari", "Þjóðolfur", "The New Society's Writ" and a few other Icelandic books. Icelanders have bought and will buy English books the first year they were bound, therefore the annual revenues were always expended in book buying; some books were in very poor shape, torn and dirty, especially 'Skírnir' and the twelfth departmental Yearbook. The national sagas had become so blackened, that they might be called illegible (to read) with bare eyes...they reduce their purchase and restrain food buying after the publication of useful books and steal courage from the scientists, who are able to write as they see, so that they should not have trouble as their due payment."
- [15] "managed to get all sorts of books, both printed and in manuscript; for example all manner of stories, rímur, yearbooks, the article-chapters of Hjálmar and Gísli, the records of the Arts Education Guild, religious publications, the tracts of Magnús Stephensen, as well as most of the new publications of the time after I came to Víðimýrarsel"(tr. Gunnars 1988:20).
- [16] "I still remember the intense pleasure I derived from the old man's arguments, and his knowledge of the Romans. His theology was less interesting to me; I neither doubted nor liked it, except for the articulate way in which the arguments were presented" (tr. Gunnars 1988:26).
- [17] "Bolshevik" refers to communist. "Bolshevism" is a term used for communism or Marxism-Leninism after the successful Russian revolution in 1917. In the Soviet Union it denoted Lenin's party in contrast to the Menshevik party which revised Marxism but did take part in the revolution and the Soviet government.
- [18] "In particular I have tried to understand the great movements of thought, especially those of my time...It is impossible not to become acquainted with some of the theories of Herbert Spencer and Darwin...which one cannot help absorbing even when it does not come first hand" (Gunnars 1988:25).
- [19] "...I could never agree completely with Spencer's idea on the (Force), or the (Unknowable), and I do not understand how the possibility of (Mutation) necessarily undermines Darwin's theory of evolution" (Gunnars 1988:25).
- [20] "...the chapter forbidding the vote for women on spiritual and congregational matters..." (Gunnars 1988:24).

- [21] "...personages who are the centre of the contradictions of an epoqe"
- [22] "In the end, he [the author] had knowledge of man, scientific knowledge, in his individual and social action".
- [23] "I am in the farmers' group here and out of sincerity - but it's good to note that our leader, Woods [Wood misspelled], holds a progressive outlook... that I agree with...right-minded class-parties, preclusion of classes without, an 'industrial classes parliament', instead of a capitalist legislature...This is the main kernel of soviet government..."
- [24] "Yes, we are still 'Bolsheviks' in this sense, that we believe that all classes should have a party arrayed for battle, not to rule over the others, but to see their part preserved without a reduction of advantage to the other labouring masses..."
- [25] "Vígslóði" was first published in Skírnir in 1915.
- [26] "The Soviet Union has withstood all ordeals up to now. There are defects, which was to be expected, but an ideal which 'grows in wisdom and grace' and one that has hope of living, as I believe, if it gets peace and progress".
- [27] All the poems referred to in this discussion, unless otherwise noted, are taken from Stephansson, Stephan G.. Andvökur I-IV. Reykjavík: Bókautgáfa menningarsjóðs, 1954.
- [28] "...hairy cloak"... "But under margins a glance of red, / like blood of veins there glittered wet" (Gunnars 1988:81). All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.
- [29] "each wakeful man / I would tangle you up in a garland wreath" (Gunnars 1988:81).
- [30] "To waddle forever with arms full / of the flatland's blackest mud."
- [31] "turbid...infinite board".
- [32] "... vessels by (the shores of) a hazy purple heather sea".
- [33] "if plowing were ended, you able farmland, you will give up: a nameless grave.
- [34] "...grass-grown burial mounds blazing".

- [35] "And unbaptized towns never allowed to grow/ for ages  
over valleys and shores/ In a father's residual memory.  
Out in night's gloom/ when commemoration kindles its  
flame/ Over grass-grown burial mounds blazing/ thus  
bright is the ancestor's soul."
- [36] "...from sun into shadows...life's attesta-  
tions...warder throughout the day".
- [37] "... no man's welfare is the other's misery ... victory  
never causes another's wounds to increase ... of negli-  
gence achievement died."
- [38] "... that life which was best in my soul/ towards the  
sunshine still turns".
- [39] "Our Unnamed Land"
- [40] "The land that you or I, or whichever one of us it may  
be, is endeared to. The land we feel the greatest ach-  
ing for, because our existence is woven into it, wheth-  
er we might have a home base somewhere else, in heaven  
or on earth. The land, which is neither "paradise  
lost" nor "paradise regained", rather just the land  
that preserves the humanness of man: the most dexterous  
handiwork and the highest of thoughts. He who was its  
soil became its growing plot. One thing is certain,  
whether cold or mild, flat or mountainous it were our  
land. On its shield we will engrave our mark, in some  
way or other and ineradicable."
- [41] "... half-unknown nation".
- [42] "... the struggle lies on its knees ... rampant capi-  
talist accumulation lack of wealth tolerates / as rot  
in living trees...beguiled and ruled by the few".
- [43] "...glimmer of progress to be a mere fable".
- [44] "... isolated sheep round-ups".
- [45] "Helgi took revenge by killing Hróðmar who had killed  
him and plundered and burned their land. Svava had  
assisted Helgi by telling him of a great sword which he  
found and used. He did not attack his half-brother who  
admitted his love for Svava, but said that he expected  
to die soon during a duel and his brother should then  
take his place with Svava."
- [46] "and after day's work night's truce is embraced / by  
each tired life-spark -(Gunnars 1988:47).
- [47] "so moving a poem"(Gunnars 1988:49).
- [48] "full of tranquil joy"(Gunnars 1988:49).

- [49] "Gnaw-tooth" ... "Ratcrib"
- [50] "My freeholder gentleman..."(Gunnars 1988:95).
- [51] Malthus was a priest who philosophized that war was proof of man's sins, but provided as well a mechanism for lowering the population as described in his book, Essay on the Principle of Population as Affects the Future Improvement of Society, published in England in 1798.
- [52] "Oh England, your chosen men,/ where are they? On Hel's trail,/ wound in shrouds of heather,/ by the whimpering waves' a dirge sung!"
- [53] Bjarkamál is one of the ancient heroic stories preserved in Saxo Grammaticus.
- [54] "Will you sit a coward / while others fight?"
- [55] This refers to one of the main events of Ragnarök (the twilight of the gods) described in the poem, "Völuspá" and in Snorri's Gylfaginning.
- [56] "... conscience-clashes. / But so that it [the conscience] howled no more, nor made a sound:"
- [57] "I tread the most false apology into it, / and incited my nation..."
- [58] "... to serve as the final dispute, / the finest witness to their belief in peace" (Gunnars 1988:97).
- [59] "Why one would flee brotherhood and concord, / to be among the malicious, / at the mercy of ancient customs, a religion, / that for two thousand years has succeeded / in reforming us as this field bears witness to" (Gunnars 1988:105).
- [60] "The so-called reform pledge-word of the political scum to all those to whom they were introduced at the end of the war was 'Reconstruction'."
- [61] "'...It is possible though, that in your country/ the holy church and powerful, as ours is,/ covers these weapons with the altar cloth.'/ 'No, she solves this problem now/ uncomfortably much like yours...'" (Gunnars 1988:103).
- [62] "heavy and abstruse"

- [63] Reverend Friðrik J. Bergmann was a liberal-minded minister of the Pembina congregation in North Dakota. He opposed the ideas of "Hið íslenska menningarfélag", but subsequently found himself less in agreement with Reverend Bjarnason's increasingly conservative attitude. He established a newspaper, "Breiðablik" (Fan of Light) in opposition to conservatism in the Synod's position. This caused him to be forced to resign from the Synod in 1909. As a result of this action, the Markerville board withdrew from the Synod (cf. McCracken 1982:82-93).
- [64] "a king in the land of the pessimists among us, Icelanders...Pessimism in the evening will become optimism tomorrow. Art is not such that all stories end well."
- [65] "Out in a Storm Because of 'In a Fluttering Blaze'". "In a Fluttering Blaze" was a book written by the Rev. Friðrik whose style Stephansson appreciated, but whose content he found too ethereal and designed to interest Icelandic youth in priesthood and therefore unacceptable material.
- [66] "If intellect does not take the reins / of emotion ... She has been hazard in the hands / of irrationality in all lands" (Gunnars 1988:87).
- [67] "Now we dance quickly, so that our chains we will relish...now our dancesteps are on spears."
- [68] "Despair was in me, alarm about future peace in our world. Much criticism awoke in me, about the machinations of the so-called great powers after the Balkan Peninsula War [1912], their long conference in Algeciras [1906] where the French got Morocco, the English dominance over Egypt and the Germans were cut a slice of Africa as a temporary pact, and more came to mind. At each of these times the world stood breathless, waiting for an international war to break out. That it did not happen some attribute to the fact that the Balkan War lasted for so long, that the working class leaders and socialists in far off lands got a chance to join hands in the coal miners' strike, in America and England, so powerful that all trade in goods which were cut out of steel was brought to a halt ... I wrote "Assverus" from this (reflection). I sent it to Eimreiðin".
- [69] "an inhabitant of every home / in the world ... and regrets burst/ in through every door and sat down / unwelcome, never to yield" (Gunnars 1988:147).

- [70] "Never could my foster mother / Take my mother's place;  
/ Always there was something lacking, / She could not  
replace. / I have yet to know the meaning / Of her leg-  
acy, / Always there's an awkward feeling / 'Twixt her-  
self and me" (McCracken 1982:6 trans. Paul Sigurdson).
- [71] "And now the field has been cleared for us!" (Gunnars  
1988:147).
- [72] "... the fate of the leaders / few, those who have not  
disappointed / their ambitions for peace and would not  
betray / the truth in adversity? ... another [Karl  
Liebknecht] is made the object of derision and charged"  
(Gunnars 1988:145).
- [73] "he instigated most the crowd / to sacrifice for the  
foster land, / knowing that is carried into the  
nation's bank / honour and wealth from his blood, /  
empty we call the throaty valour / which is buying the  
title democratic: It took the greatest courage / their  
daring not to take part."

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