

Halldor Hermannsson

January 6, 1878 — August 28, 1958

Halldor Hermannsson was born on January 6, 1878, in Rangarvellin, Iceland. His father was a district judge. He graduated from the Latin school of Reykjavik, then attended the University of Copenhagen. He met Willard Fiske, who was already assembling his Icelandic collection and was seeking aid in cataloging of it. Fiske immediately recognized in Hermannsson a fellow-bibliographer, and bore him off to his Florentine villa in December, 1899. Hermannsson spent more than a year in Florence and heard much talk of Cornell from Fiske and his young librarian, Edwin H. Woodruff (destined to be Dean of the Cornell Law School). His task completed, Hermannsson returned to Copenhagen and to various bookish occupations.

Fiske died in September, 1904, leaving his great library to Cornell, with provision for a curator of the Icelandic collection. Hermannsson was appointed, in 1905, to this post and to an instructorship in Scandinavian languages. He was later lecturer, Assistant Professor, and, in 1924, Professor. He retired from the professorship in 1946 and from the curatorship in 1948.

At Cornell, Hermannsson was known as librarian, bibliographer, and teacher. We were hardly aware of his repute as an authority on Icelandic history and literature. Annually, Cornell publishes a volume termed *Islandica*; thirty-one of these Hermannsson wrote himself, and two others he edited. He also published four catalogs of our unparalleled collections. His many, varied, and authoritative contributions to Icelandic studies made him, in time, the Old Master in his field. Iceland delighted to honor her distinguished son with awards and medals and memberships in knightly orders. (He was Grand-Chevalier of the Order of the Falcon.) In 1930, he received an honorary doctorate from the University of Iceland.

He died in Ithaca on August 28, 1958.

He was a man of books. Enormously erudite, he found the life of books so satisfying that he had no need of another. Learning was his only bride, his business, and his joy. His opinions were strong, his judgments often sharp. Much engaged in controversy, he was always an honorable, though redoubtable, opponent.

He was in many ways a representative of a fading culture—that of nineteenth-century humanistic enlightenment. In his fifty-three years in Ithaca, he never lost his European courtliness and dignity. (He never possessed, doubtless, a sports jacket; he never first-named even his best friends.) He had known well the great men of Cornell's lusty

youth, and he loved to tell piquant anecdotes about them. His keen curiosity continued to the end. Crippled by painful illness in his later days, he never complained, but chose rather to question his visitor on the events and the performers of the active world. His was a fine example of scholarly serenity, of the philosophy, learned from books, which comforts the spirit and defies the augmenting, dissolving, pains of the body.

Morris Bishop, Johann Hannesson, Robert M. Ogden