

Another great poet of the seventeenth century is Dean *Stefán Ólafsson* (1620—1688), a very prolific writer of poetry, both religious and secular. Dean *Stefán* is a confirmed realist, and describes humble life in all its forms, sometimes in a bitter vein; yet he is not lacking in tender feeling. He employs a variety of metres, some of them very elaborate.

*Eighteenth century poets.* Lawman *Páll Jónsson Vídalín* (1667—1727) wrote a number of single verses, remarkable for their sweetness of flow and clear thought. Dean *Gunnar Pálsson* (1714—1768), a man of vast erudition in antiquarian lore, is a genuine Icelander both in thought and expression. *Eggert Ólafsson* (1726—1768), the great naturalist and pioneer of culture, studied abroad where he acquired a great variety and amount of learning. His sincere patriotism and desire to instruct his countrymen and show them the right way in everything are apparent in all his poems, which, though remarkably good for those days and sometimes reaching a high level, seem to readers of our day more illustrative of the author's keen intellect and profound learning than of any great poetical power.

In the *nineteenth* and *twentieth* centuries Iceland has produced many first-class poets who have in the main followed the old traditions, though with a wider range of subject and a greater variety of form. Their poetry is on the whole intensely national in spirit, showing in the first place the Icelander's fondness for history, and secondly that our history is for the most part biographical. Many of the noblest and most beautiful poems in our language, from *Egill Skallagrímsson's* 'Sonatorrek' onward, are funeral dirges, composed in commemoration of dead friends, and due to a need to understand and explain their character, to show their attitude to the work and struggle of the nation, and thus, as it were, to carve their names in marble. Funeral poems have been made on persons in every walk of life, men and women, young and old, and there is hardly an Icelandic poet who has not tried his hand at this kind of poetry.

This period is also remarkable for no small number of poems on famous men of the past, and on great events in our history past and present. On the other hand, if we except the *rímur*, only two of our sagas have been worked into metrical form, neither poem being of any great merit. This might seem strange, but the reason is obvious: to most Icelanders it would seem a lost endeavour to weave into narrative verse the events which have received an imperishable form in