President's Yale
New Haven, May 21/92

Mr B. F. Underwood,

Dear Sir,

No one, I believe, is ever "born with" a language, either their mother-tongue or any other; one's mother-tongue is nothing else that the tongue which one first learns. The curious case which is described in the slip you enclose cannot possibly be anything else than a striking and extreme instance of the kind to which you yourself refer — of children taking a fancy to use other signs than those which they hear others use about them, just as they might insist to a certain extent, and for a time, on writing in characters different from those used by their friends. There must

be a good deal that is wrong in the account of B. Arason reported at second hand by your "young Icelander", who is, as I suppose F. Johnson; that a person of the gifts of the one described should have been unable to "learn our language" is simply unthinkable. What ordinarily gifted human being is unable to learn any human language among the speakers of which he (or she) grows up? Apparently the case was a very curious one, and a really accurate description of it would be very welcome. I do not remember any full accounts of such cases in any work that I have read, and yet less a discussion of them.

Yours truly,

W. D. Whitney

Prof Whitney
President W. D Whitney
Of Yale College

President of Yale